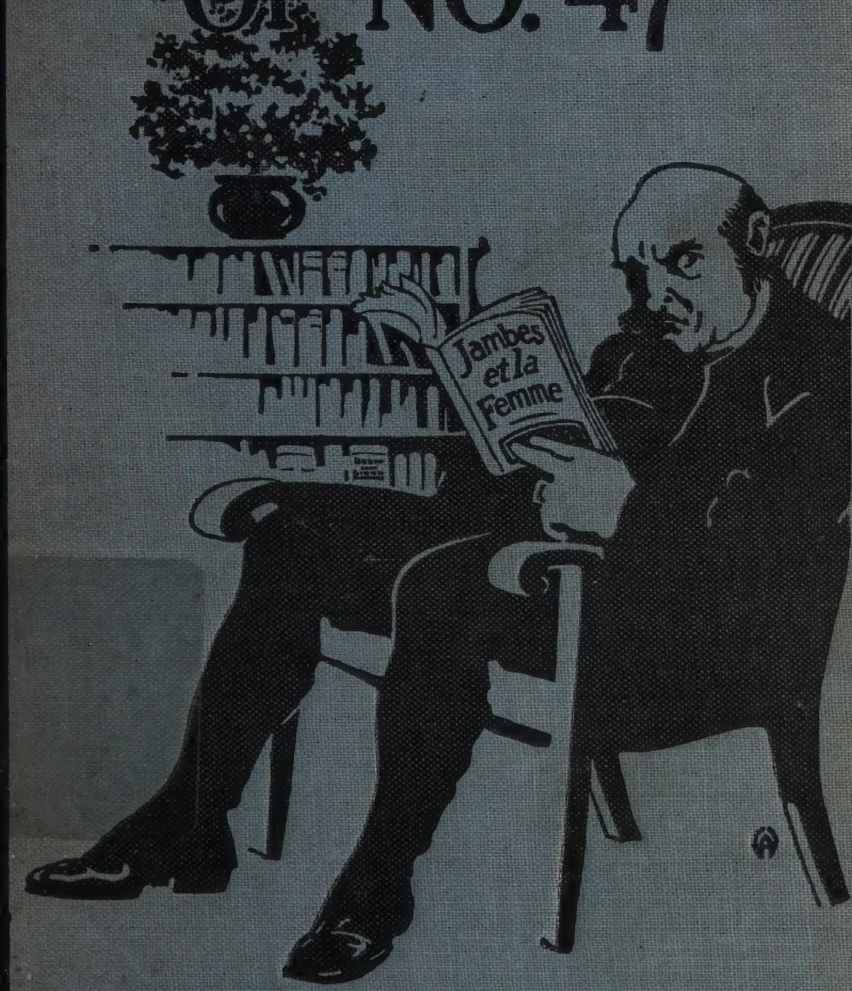
THE MYSTERY OF NO. 47



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THE MYSTERY OF NUMBER 47

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BY

J. STORER CLOUSTON

AUTHOR OF "THE LUNATIC AT LARGE," ETC.

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CONTENTS

PAGE

PART I

THE DINNER 1

PART II

THE SLEUTHHOUNDS 82

PART III

THE BODY 128

PART IV

THE CHASE 163

PART V

THE ATTIC 203

THE MYSTERY OF NUMBER 47

PART I

THE DINNER

I

In all London no district has more romantic and suggestive associations, or a name that better indicates them, than St. John's Wood. Middle-aged gentlemen of an adventurous turn, who have been abroad since the Great Central destroyed certain of its byways, still jump into a cab on their arrival at Charing Cross, and drive to this pleasant neighborhood with beating hearts; and though they may only find a railway cutting where they remembered their youth, at the same time there yet remain a number of the most secluded and secretive-looking roads to be seen in any capital in Europe. Among these perhaps the most ideal is Hyacinth Road—a narrow cul-de-sac with a bend in the middle of it that makes the houses at the further end of it quite invisible from the opening, and shaded by many well-grown trees. Each house stands a little distance back, inviolably guarded from the curious by a high brick wall in which an unostentatious door stands

always closed. Each might well have been the scene of a passionate or sinister romance and possibly each has been; but while the others still guard their secrets, No. 47 has become a landmark in the annals of crime. Outwardly it had nothing to distinguish it from its neighbors, except that it was, if possible, still more shrouded in mysterious seclusion; or at least, it certainly seemed so to the hundreds of fascinated spectators who for a month or more came thither to stare at the chimney-pots and glimpse of roof and upper windows, which is all of it you can see from the opposite sidewalk.

A few years ago this little villa was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Irwin Molyneux and their two domestics. Like many other subsequently notorious personages, Mr. Irwin Molyneux was to outward seeming the last man one would associate with a crime of unparalleled atrocity. His studious and blameless youth had been passed at one of the best-known public schools and most respectable Oxford colleges. He had taken the highest honors in every examination for which he had entered, held for several years a fellowship of All Souls', and at last married a lady of excellent parentage and perfect refinement. They had £400 a year of private means between them, an income which he endeavored to augment by the composition of scholarly essays on the minor poets of the sixteenth century; but, though written with extreme care and in the chastest English, these had not yielded hitherto on an average more than £15 annually. They served, however, to give

him a certain reputation among the elect, and kept his mind tranquil while composing them.

His person was as seemingly guileless as his pursuits. He was at this time in the young fifties, slender and rather above middle height, with a slight stoop, a cultured voice and precise articulation, and refined features. When it is added that he possessed, almost to exaggeration, that manner peculiarly associated with graduates of the University of Oxford, wore eyeglasses and collected china, it may be judged how dark were the circumstances which could make the name of such a gentleman a household word wherever an evening or Sunday paper penetrated.

Mrs. Molyneux was as thorough a lady as her husband was (apparently) a gentleman. She was a matronly dame, extremely well educated, and accustomed to move in the most cultured circles. There their resemblance ceased, since she was as practical and managing as he was absent-minded and academic; but in spite (or perhaps because) of this difference, they lived together in almost complete harmony. To be exact, they had only one ground of quarrel. Even this (for reasons which will afterwards appear) did not come out in the course of the inquiry; it is revealed now for the first time, and it is hardly necessary to say that extreme attention should be given to the circumstance, trifling though it may sound.

The authentic facts are these: Some years before, in the stimulating mountain air of Switzerland, Mr. Molyneux conceived the idea of founding a de-

tective story upon an anecdote narrated by a gentleman staying in the same hotel. Nothing could be more foreign to his usual habits, but the mountain air prevailed, and for the next few weeks the cultured essayist found himself, to his great surprise, pouring forth chapter upon chapter with a fluency that had never marked his work before. His wife was, at first, a trifle scandalized, but being a lady of the most marked common sense, she insisted that, having committed the outrage, it would merely aggravate his sin against culture if he obtained no remuneration for his trouble. The strictest anonymity was, of course, essential, and the chosen publisher was sworn to secrecy by the solemnest oath used in the trade. The results (to use the loose language of this gentleman's advertisements) were positively startling. The appearance of *Dark as Death,* by "Felix Chapel," caused a sensation that will still be remembered by many and gave several hundred thousand readers in all parts of the globe a distinct aversion to sleeping without a night light and a police whistle.

Since then an unfortunate attempt to take advantage of the rubber boom had straitened Mr. and Mrs. Molyneux considerably; and it became the constant supplication of his wife that "Felix Chapel" should once more enter the lists of fiction. This the cultured ex-fellow of All Souls' was much averse from doing. So ashamed was he of his previous lapse that even to his most intimate friends no hint was breathed of his identity with the notorious "Chapel"; and as to writing a successor to *Dark*

as Death he repeatedly declared that he could not imagine himself visited a second time by any such unholy inspiration.

"Unholy!" said his wife. "Do you think it is any worse than being dunned by our tradesmen?"

"You forget, my love," he would answer gently, "that the composition of a meretricious romance is not our only resource. Your Aunt Margaret has very definitely expressed her intention of benefiting us materially——"

"When she dies, certainly."

"My dear, she is eighty-two."

"Her mother lived to be ninety-five."

"I do not wish to be pessimistic," he would reply, "but I cannot think poor Aunt Margaret is likely to enjoy life for quite so long——"

"Irwin!" she said, "these speculations are unseemly; especially as Aunt Margaret's constitution makes them useless. Your duty is clear."

And thereafter for several days he would have the unhappy look of a man who contemplates doing his duty.

This recurring dispute and the financial embarrassment that gave rise to it were the two small clouds upon their horizon during the months that preceded the strange and startling events of this narrative.

On a certain morning in October in the year 19— Mr. Molyneux was busy in his garden. In addition to his affection for china, he had a taste for horticulture which, when the weather became salubrious,

developed into a passion. On a fine day he would spend many peaceful hours digging in his flower beds or gently propelling a light lawn mower; and this particular morning, being very warm for the time of year, found him pleasurably engaged in planting bulbs.

"Irwin!" cried his wife.

There was a note in her voice that made him look up with a start. What to expect he knew not, but even in that instant he was conscious of a chill premonition. Often in the dreadful days that followed he recalled the strange sensation. He saw her hurrying from the house, a telegram in her hand.

"Read that!" she said.

He read it, and his expression grew like hers.

"Can't we put him off?" he exclaimed.

"He has given us no address to wire to!"

They looked at one another gloomily.

"It means that we must buy champagne," she said.

"And give him a seven-course dinner, I suppose?"

"It is grossly inconsiderate of him!" she exclaimed. "He ought to know that we can't possibly afford to entertain bishops!"

"Some bishops, we might," said he. "A suffragan or a colonial perhaps; but not Cousin Bedford! Why the dickens was I born related to him!"

Though his language was studiously moderate, it was easy to see that he was considerably moved.

With fresh concern his wife exclaimed,

"And it is Eva's afternoon out! That must be changed at all costs!"

She started for the house as she spoke, leaving him to gaze unhappily at his bulbs. He seemed, even then, to have a foreboding of the sinister events that were so swiftly to follow.

II

"SINGIN'!" said Miss Abbitts, "A-singin' to 'erself again!"

With a resolute air she left the kitchen and strode towards the housemaid's pantry.

"I can't abear it no longer!" she pronounced, "I'll speak my mind to the 'ussy, if I gets the sack for it!"

Miss Abbitts had arrived at No. 47 six months previously, with an excellent character for plain and fancy cooking, a tin trunk, and a flushed face. For twenty minutes thereafter an infuriated cabman had lingered in the road, vowing that his legal fare was not sufficient to compensate him for the exceptional virulence of the lady's insults; and Mrs. Molyneux had realized that "temper fair, but at times a trifle uncertain" had meant more than met the eye at the first reading.

She flung open the pantry door. Within, a girl was cleaning silver; singing softly to herself the while. One could only see her back: it was slim and gracefully poised.

"'Ere!" said Miss Abbitts.

The girl turned with a start, and revealed a face that more than bore out the promise of her back.

"Well, Jane!" she said in a voice very singular

for a house-parlormaid. It was as refined as the voice of the essayist himself.

"Stop that singin', will yer!" cried Miss Abbitts, her indignation waxing as she warmed to her work. "What I've come to tell yer is this—and it's time you knew it at larst—I can't abear your affectuated voice no longer! Lydy 'ousemaid yer calls yerself indeed! Where's yer bloomin' lydy manners? Singin' in your mistress' 'ouse just as if it was your own, till my 'ead is like to split! Will yer stop it?"

The girl looked at her at first in extreme surprise. Then she said with a smile:

"I have stopped, Jane. Isn't your head feeling better?"

But Miss Abbitts was not to be appeased by persiflage.

"Ho, Miss Impidence! Funny, are you? But I knows what's in your narsty mind! Always a-singin' on your days out—I've noticed it—don't you think I 'aven't. Fine carryin's on is goin' to 'appen, ain't they just! 'Oo's the 'appy man? A *gentleman,* per'aps? You'll get into trouble one of them fine days——"

"Jane," said the voice of her mistress, "*I* want to speak to Eva."

Miss Abbitts' face flushed; her displeasure seemed rather inflamed than assuaged, but she withdrew. Mrs. Molyneux entered the pantry and closed the door behind her. Miss Abbitts paused on her way back to the kitchen. A murmur of voices reached her ears. Then she stealthily returned; though with

praiseworthy delicacy she did not actually open the door, but contented herself with standing quite still immediately outside.

For a lady of a naturally impetuous temper and decided views, her relations with Eva were undoubtedly trying. About a month after her arrival at No. 47, the fastidious habits of Mr. Molyneux had suggested to his wife the experiment of engaging what was described as a "lady housemaid." This blend had been introduced, Mrs. Molyneux was told, in order to provide an occupation for the daughters of curates and Irish landowners, and could be strongly recommended to persons of a sensitive temperament. The appearance of Eva Wilson was the result of her negotiations.

At first Miss Abbitts was a trifle awed by the superiority of her new colleague. Then she caught the milkman (hitherto her single-minded admirer) casting such a languishing glance at the new housemaid that respect gave place to a riotous succession of emotions. Each week increased her suspicions and her distaste, till to-day human nature could endure it no longer. Though interrupted, she felt a little better for her candor already: and suddenly, as she stood there, she grew almost entirely relieved. She had heard little; but one sentence was distinct.

When Mrs. Molyneux at last came out she was so disturbed that she hardly noticed the retiring form of her cook. Miss Abbitts only waited till she had ascended the basement stairs. Then returning to the pantry, with a glow of derisive triumph she cried:

"Sacked! I knew it 'ud come!"

Mrs. Molyneux hurried back to the garden and again disturbed the essayist. Without preamble she announced,

"In future, Irwin, you will have to put up with an ordinary well-disciplined domestic servant. Eva actually refuses to give up her afternoon out! I have reasoned with her—implored her! I gave her the choice of any other day she liked—she was just like a mule! I don't know what has happened to the girl; but I can tell you what is going to happen—she is leaving my service in a month!"

He gazed at her blankly.

"Eva going! But, my dear Harriet, recollect for a moment the unspeakable females who officiated previously! Really, my love, we can't run the risk of falling back again on that species of biped who used to drop my china."

"Your china must take its chance!" she replied, and left him a prey to ever-deepening dejection.

III

It is strange that the first events of this drama should pass amid pacific and even cheerful scenes, but so the irony of fate ordained. About four o'clock that afternoon, a singularly handsome couple entered Ye Antique Tea Rooms in New Bond Street. This establishment, being a remarkably accurate reproduction of the surroundings amid which our forefathers drank bohea, contained many secluded corners pleasantly illuminated by pink-shaded electric lamps, as admirably adapted to the requirements of the twentieth century as they must have been to those of the sixteenth. In one of these the couple very quietly took their seats, and by their confidential manner evidently desired their fellow visitors to discuss any other subject they preferred.

The young man was tall, immaculately dressed, and extremely good-looking, with charming manners, a soldierly bearing, and a certain hint of enterprise and resolution conscientiously concealed beneath an airy deportment more in keeping with the fashion of the hour. Yet it soon became evident that this afternoon he found it difficult to avoid being in earnest. Before long he had even an air of suppressed excitement.

The girl was dressed as quietly as fashion permitted, yet with such happy cunning that the eyes of

all the women present were at once riveted in critical appreciation. The men, on the other hand, only noticed that beneath the shade of a coquettish hat was a face that made them envious of the fortunate gentleman beside her. It was both vivacious and demure; its chin was firm; its color delicately bright, and its nose entrancingly independent. The confidential couple, in fact, provoked exactly the attention they desired to avoid.

"Why, it's Lord Francis!" exclaimed one lady to another in a discreet whisper.

"Which Lord Francis?" inquired her friend.

"Lord Francis Phillimore, of the Horse Guards Blue, the man, don't you know, who plays polo. I've seen him often at Ranelagh."

"And who is the girl?"

"Ah, that's a different story! I wonder very much indeed. Certainly I've never seen *her* anywhere."

"Ah!" agreed her friend.

Meantime, the handsome couple talked in lowered voices, toying with tea-cakes which they hardly tasted.

"Marie," said Lord Francis earnestly, "why are you always so mysterious?"

A little evasively she replied,

"It is simply that you won't believe me."

"But what is there for me to believe? You tell me nothing!"

"I have told you something," she murmured in a very low voice.

He pressed her foot gently, with a movement so discreet that it could be seen by no one except the people at the other tables.

"I know you have," he answered tenderly. "Marie dear, you have made me the happiest man in the world; only—only why shouldn't we be frank with each other now?"

"Could I have been franker?"

"You know what I mean," he answered. "You don't even tell me where you live, or what you do, or why you can meet me so seldom; only once a week in the afternoon and every other Sunday. They are like the hours when a housemaid gets out!"

The girl started perceptibly, and threw one frightened glance at his face. But he was smiling affectionately, and she seemed reassured. Yet she became more thoughtful.

"Of course, you think me an adventuress," she said.

"An adventuress!" he protested. "Marie, I swear I don't!"

"But you must!" she persisted. "You only met me in a train."

"What a bit of luck it was!" he smiled.

"But it wasn't a proper introduction. I might have been anybody. Of course, I've told you since that my father was a penniless naval officer; it's quite true, but you have only my word for it."

"That's quite enough for me!"

She smiled at last.

"You are really absurdly confiding!"

"So are you. I may be a rotten bad egg for all you know."

"No, Francis"—she blushed prettily as she used this name, for they had only just reached that stage—"there is all the difference between us. You are rich, and respected, and well known. I am poor, and—and humble, and—and I won't let you know anything more about me!"

The tender defiance in her eyes only seemed to inflame the young guardsman's ardor.

"I shall find out! We love each other, and I've got to know!" he cried.

She looked a little frightened at his air of determination.

"Not yet!" she pleaded. "Please, Francis, not yet!"

His eyes remained fixed intently upon her and for a moment he was silent. Then he said,

"Not yet! Why not yet?"

"Because I say so."

Still he looked at her.

"*You* can have nothing to feel ashamed of, Marie?"

"Ashamed?" For an instant she hesitated and then answered firmly. "There is nothing I *ought* to feel ashamed of—nothing I—I can help."

"Nothing you can help?" he replied, eagerly catching at each straw. "You mean—you mean that you can't help it *now*—whatever it is?"

She looked at him doubtfully, and then answered cautiously,

"Yes, I mean that I can't help whatever it is now. But I mean to free myself——"

She stopped as if she feared she had said too much. His eyes gleamed as though his surmise were confirmed.

"You are not free now, but you mean to free yourself! Marie, I—I think I can guess. I had half suspected——"

"Half suspected what?"

They looked into one another's eyes.

"Shall we each be frank?" he said. "If I tell you what I guess, will you tell me the rest?"

"No, no!" she said quickly. "I don't believe you can possibly guess the truth."

"There is an obstacle, and *it* is going to be removed; isn't that right?"

"*It?*" she repeated.

"That's the truth, isn't it?"

She still seemed to be a little puzzled; yet still a little afraid. Then with a sudden change of air, she asked,

"And now, what's the time?"

"Only five minutes to six."

She started up.

"I must fly!" she said.

He looked both disappointed and mystified, but he only put his hand in his pocket and drew out a dark blue leather case.

"Take this, Marie, first," he murmured in her ear, as they stood together beside the table.

He quietly transferred it to her hand. She pressed the spring, and gave a little gasp.

"Pearls!" she cried. "Oh, Francis, this is far, far too good for me!"

"Nothing can be!" he answered.

A few minutes later they stood together on the crowded Bond Street pavement, their fingers touching surreptitiously.

"A hansom?" he inquired.

"Can't you get me a taxi-cab? I shall be late if you don't."

"Late for what?" he demanded.

"Get me a taxi-cab, please, Francis!" she pleaded.

A year or two ago taxi-cabs were not to be picked up at any moment upon the streets of London. They had to wait for a few minutes till one came by; then she jumped in, waved a farewell, and whizzed off.

"I wish to Heaven I knew where she was going!" he sighed, as he stood by the curb, looking disconsolately after her.

The wish had hardly crossed his mind before a second taxi-cab passed, also empty. The man held up his hand inquiringly. It seemed even betting whether the coincidence was providential or diabolical, and Lord Francis took the sporting chance.

"Follow that taxi in front!" he exclaimed, as he sprang in.

At the corner of Oxford Street the traffic was held up for a few minutes, and his cab drew within twenty yards of the other. When the policeman stepped

aside, the first cab turned west, then north out of Oxford Street, then west to Baker Street, and then whizzed straight northwards.

"I hope she doesn't look out through the window at the back!" said Lord Francis to himself. "What the deuce would she think of me?"

He lay back in the darkest corner with his hat over his eyes to guard against this contingency, debating a nice point of honor. He had never promised not to follow her,—and yet—if it were strictly honorable, why did he try to conceal himself? He sat boldly up, which appeased his conscience a little; yet the debate continued. In fact, it was still in progress as they passed St. John's Wood Road Station, and had not been settled even when he saw the cab stop beside the pavement of a dark and quiet road, close to the opening of another road, darker and narrower. He watched the girl jump out, pay her driver, and hurry up the side road.

"Well," he thought, "since I've come so far——"

And thus thinking he paid his own cab, and hurried stealthily up Hyacinth Road. The girl disappeared round the bend, moving with that firm, graceful walk he knew so well, and running forward a few steps he was just in time to see her vanish through a door in a high brick wall. He went just far enough to note the number. It was 47.

For a few minutes he stood stock-still in the dusk of the October evening, under the shade of the overhanging trees, immersed in the profoundest medita-

tion. Then with an air of settled conviction, he said to himself,

"I'm certain of it!"

Still meditating, he started to walk slowly homewards.

IV

THE green door shut behind the girl, and she found herself in a dark little front garden, overhung by branches on which gleamed a ray or two of lamplight from the road. Even in the dusk you could see that everything was neat and trim and small: a trim little plot of grass, a short, trim gravel path, a neat little stuccoed villa. It was so quiet down this backwater, far away from the traffic of the streets, with garden after garden stretching all round, that any one unaware of the tendency of crime and drama to haunt just such secluded nooks, might think this the very home of innocence and peace.

The girl paused for an instant.

"I am Eva once more!" she sighed, and hurried on to the back-door. It was opened in her face, and the note of peace departed. A stout woman carrying a band-box came out, throwing over her shoulder these parting words, in a voice distorted with passion,

"Perlice to you, Mrs. Molyneux, and many of them! Them as doesn't like my language I leaves to say whether or not it's their consciences as is a-prickin' 'em! Stay in this house one moment longer, I will not. Presently, Mrs. Molyneux, I will return a-bringin' of a keb, and perlice it will be if you dares to touch my boxes till I comes to fetch 'em! Ho!"

This last interjection indicated that the lady had perceived the fashionably-dressed figure shrinking back into the obscurity of the garden. "'Ere's Miss Fine-feathers 'er beautiful self! I wishes you joy of 'er, and may she honestly 'ave come by them finery and furs, which is more nor I believes, myself! Ho! Lydy, indeed? Slut!"

With this benediction she shook the dust of No. 47 from her feet, and a moment later had banged the green door behind her forever.

Like many others, both persons and animals, suffering from acute exasperation, Miss Abbitts was inclined, at such moments, to resent even the best intentioned overtures. When, therefore, she was accosted in the darkest part of Hyacinth Road by a strange gentleman, not even the grace with which he removed his silk hat assuaged her indignation.

"Pardon me, Madam," he began in bland and polished accents.

"'Ere!" cried Miss Abbitts, interrupting him peremptorily, "Stand aside hout o' my way, young man, or I'll fetch the perlice to you likewise!"

For a moment he recoiled, transfixed by her virginal glare, and then recovering his courage, turned and followed her.

"You have come from No. 47, I believe?" he said this time.

She started and stared at him.

"I 'ave!" she replied with majestic defiance.

Lord Francis was blessed with quick discrimination and the happiest tact.

"And you are now looking for a cab, I perceive," he continued politely. "Will you allow me to find one for you?"

Miss Abbitts breathed heavily, and then in slightly less forbidding accents, replied,

"I *ham* a-lookin' for a keb, young man."

"Let me carry your band-box, Madam, till we find one," he suggested.

She clutched it convulsively.

"No you don't!" said she.

He smiled amiably.

"In that case you must at least allow me to pay your cab fare."

"You can pay if you likes, but I warns you I goes in that keb *alone,*" she replied virtuously.

"That is quite understood," said he. "In fact, all I ask of you is a very small piece of information. What is the name of the people at No. 47?"

"Nime?" she said, with a toss of her feathered hat, "Molyneux is their nime."

"Molyneux?" he repeated, with a curious catch of excitement in his voice. "There is a Mrs. Molyneux, I believe?"

"There is—and the less said about 'er, the better."

"Indeed?" said he. "May I ask why?"

"The way she 'as treated me would 'ave infuriated a angel!"

The young man grew exceedingly sympathetic.

"I am very sorry to hear it," he assured her. "What has she done?"

"A-leavin' me alone and unaided to cook 'er blessed dinners for 'er blessed bishops! Alone and unaided all the blessed day! Not a one to 'elp me! That young 'ussy, I could wring 'er neck!"

The young man jumped to a very natural conclusion.

"Then she is quite young?" he inquired eagerly.

"She is young and she is deceitful and she is——"

"And she has been out all the afternoon?" he interrupted.

"Hevery blessed minute till this blessed moment! I met 'er a-comin' in at the very door. 'Ussy she is, and 'ussy she——"

"I had better get your cab for you now," said Lord Francis hurriedly. "If you will wait at this corner I'll send one down to you. Where are you going?"

"'Olloway," said the outraged lady.

"I think," said he, "that will cover the fare," and raising his hat again, he hurried off.

"Marie Molyneux!" he said to himself.

Downcast and trembling a little, Eva entered the now doomed house. She found—probably for the first time in their lives—the elegant essayist and his wife assembled in their kitchen. Both seemed agitated. "Oh, Eva!" cried Mrs. Molyneux, a quiver of indignation in her voice, "do you see what you have done?"

"Oh, what have I?" murmured the girl.

"We have lost our cook, thanks to you! This

dreadful affair began simply because you deserted her this afternoon. I hope you are satisfied?"

"My dear Harriet," interposed her husband with creditable philosophy. "You must remember that Eva could scarcely be expected to anticipate this—ah—precise contingency. We are well rid of an excessively blasphemous female——"

His wife interrupted him sharply.

"And what about the Bishop's dinner?"

There was a moment's silence, broken only by a murmured "Good Heavens!" from Mr. Molyneux. His wife was the first to speak.

"Have you no idea at all where he is likely to be staying in town, Irwin?"

He shook his head disconsolately.

"I haven't the very least conception, my dear."

"Then we can't possibly put him off!"

"It is not possible, my love. I fear it is not feasible."

"Obviously it isn't feasible," said she with a touch of tartness.

"Well then, my love——" Mr. Molyneux stopped, shrugged his shoulders, and looked at his wife tragically.

"I can cook a little," said Eva. "Oh, if you'd let me, I'd try my best!"

"*You* cook a dinner for the Bishop of Bedford!" exclaimed her mistress.

"You mean well," sighed Mr. Molyneux, "but the Bishop is one of the most notorious *gourmets*—I think I may almost say in Europe, Harriet?"

"He pays his own *chef* £150," she answered.

"If only you could superintend Eva's operations, my dear, one might achieve something. I would almost back your culinary skill, Harriet, against his lordship's *chef*."

"And who would wait?"

Again he shrugged his shoulders unhappily.

"But can't you explain the situation?" Eva ventured.

Mr. and Mrs. Molyneux looked at one another and shook their heads.

"He is not that kind of bishop," said he.

"He would never forgive us," she added. "I know him too well."

"I say nothing against his piety," continued Mr. Molyneux, "and I do not wish to be unkind; yet I fear I must pronounce him the most formidable snob of my acquaintance. He is the last man in England whom one could entertain with chops and an explanation."

"And yet, Irwin," said his wife, "what else is there for it?"

He shook his head decidedly.

"My love, I should spend the most miserable evening of my existence, and our acquaintance with our distinguished relative would terminate."

Suddenly a gleam of purpose appeared in Mrs. Molyneux's eye. In a voice a little agitated, yet both determined and inspired, she exclaimed,

"There is only one thing for it!"

V

A BISHOP is seldom seen to greater advantage than when consuming a well-cooked dinner in slightly servile society. The Bishop of Bedford was no exception to this rule; his substantially proportioned frame and large pink countenance, framed in trim side whiskers, diffused an atmosphere of majesty throughout Mr. Molyneux's small but tasteful dining-room.

Nothing could have been more impressive than his bearing, or awe-inspiring than the glance of his Episcopal eye. Mr. Molyneux's attitude, on the other hand, though it embellished the Bishop, hardly did justice to so distinguished a man of letters. He was polite to the verge of timidity; while a certain nervous confusion and absence of mind would almost lead one to suppose either that he felt more abashed than is natural to an author, or that the state of his conscience was unsatisfactory. They were dining tête-à-tête, with Eva in attendance.

"It is really very unfortunate, Irwin," said the Bishop, "that your dear wife should not be here."

"Very," said Mr. Molyneux hurriedly.

"She was called suddenly into the country, you say?"

"Yes, Cousin Bedford," murmured his host.

"To what part of the country, may I ask?"

In one of his recent essays Mr. Molyneux had expressed his unqualified admiration for the finished liar. A civilized conversationalist, he maintained, should have a ready answer for every question, and leave the search for truth to the solitude of his chamber. One would naturally expect this counsel of perfection to be exemplified by the essayist himself. Yet he spent several seconds in eliminating an almost microscopic fish-bone before replying, and even then answered with marked hesitation and surprising vagueness,

"The—ah—neighborhood of—er—Brighton, I believe."

His relative looked at him hard, but Mr. Molyneux never raised his eyes from his plate.

"Am I to understand that she did not mention precisely where she was going?"

"It—er—was a little place. I had—ah—meant to look it up on the map," said Mr. Molyneux.

"Indeed?" commented the Bishop. "Has she gone to stay with friends?"

"With friends—yes," said Mr. Molyneux, rather as though he was relieved at having so simple a solution suggested.

A particularly delicious entrée diverted his guest's thoughts for a few minutes; and the Bishop's next remark was:

"I must congratulate you on your cook, Irwin."

As a rule no compliment could have better pleased his æsthetic host; but that night it seemed only to

embarrass him still further. He merely murmured an indistinct reply.

"May I ask if you have had her long?" inquired the Bishop.

"About—about——" began Mr. Molyneux. "I really forget," he concluded, with a fleeting and, it seemed to the Bishop, nervous glance at him.

The Bishop was visibly puzzled by this behavior. He frowned through the rest of his portion of entrée; and then, with an air of benevolent concern, inquired,

"I trust, Irwin, it was not news of an unpleasant nature that called your dear wife away?"

"Oh, no, Cousin Bedford. It was only—only——" Mr. Molyneux stopped and steadied himself by emptying his wine-glass. "It was only a case of measles," he concluded.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed his lordship. "Do you mean to say she has rushed off on the eve of my coming to nurse a mere case of measles?"

"They are German measles, I understand," said Mr. Molyneux, in a hurried voice.

His lordship stared at him for some moments.

"Are you a member of the Navy League?" he inquired.

Mr. Molyneux looked bewildered.

"That is the only excuse I can imagine for such an extraordinary ebullition of anti-Teutonic sentiment," the Bishop explained sternly.

"Of course," said Mr. Molyneux in a husky voice, "there may have been other reasons, Cousin Bedford."

"What other reasons do you suspect?"

"Suspect?" said Mr. Molyneux. "Oh, I—ah—do not positively suspect, but—er—that solution suggested itself."

Through the next two courses the distinguished prelate maintained a grave and thoughtful silence. Whenever his eye fell upon his host, that cultured scholar was alarmed to note a look of unmistakable suspicion. At length he inquired:

"When does your dear wife return, Irwin?"

During this period of silence Mr. Molyneux had evidently been meditating upon the subject of his recent essay, and had come to the conclusion that it was time he put his principles into practice. In marked contrast to his previous hesitation, he answered glibly,

"At 10:51 to-morrow morning, Cousin Bedford."

It is a discouraging fact that our virtues are often more costly than our faults. The Bishop reflected for a few moments longer, and then, with an air of having come to an important decision, said:

"I am going to ask a favor of you, Irwin."

Like the requests of royalty, this was clearly to be taken as a command, and Mr. Molyneux answered, meekly and unsuspiciously:

"I am at your service, Cousin Bedford."

"The bedroom at my club, where I am staying, is both incommodious and draughty. With your permission, I shall telephone for my bag to be packed and sent here, and occupy your spare room over to-night. I shall thus have the pleasure, Irwin, of

seeing your dear wife when she returns at 10:51 to-morrow morning. Your precision as to the moment of her arrival encourages me to believe that, by taking this course, I cannot fail to give myself the satisfaction of greeting her."

Mr. Molyneux's fork clattered on his plate. His naturally pale face grew even paler, and his voice quavered as he answered:

"De—delighted, Cousin Bedford."

It was clear that these accompanying symptoms of delight had not been lost upon the prelate. He transfixed his host with a searching look, and added:

"No doubt we shall obtain more authentic particulars of her remarkable exodus; with regard to which I make no doubt you feel as much curiosity as myself."

With the possible exception of the ex-man-eating Dean of Fiji, the Bishop of Bedford enjoyed the reputation of inspiring more respect among his subordinates than any other dignitary of the Anglican persuasion. He had the eye of an eagle for the first symptom of a troubled conscience, and he made it a point of principle never to relax his vigilance till he discovered the precise sin of which his erring brother had been guilty.

From this moment the strictness of his scrutiny increased; not a circumstance, however small, escaped his observation; and he had the satisfaction of making one discovery which, on subsequent reflection, increased his already high respect for his own powers of divination.

It was made when they adjourned to the library for coffee and cigars. In the act of taking his coffee from the tray, he happened to raise his eyes and they chanced to light upon the face of Eva. Suppressing a slight start, he deliberately helped himself to sugar, and then steadily and gravely gazed at the girl while she offered the tray to her master. It is true that during dinner he had been aware of the presence of a third party behind the chairs, but dinner to his lordship was a function almost as solemn and quite as engrossing as church. His was not the shallow mind that turns from what is upon the table to what is not. Now for the first time he realized the remarkable beauty of this girl, and he frowned, not temporarily and carelessly, but for the rest of the evening and thoughtfully.

Though now a bishop he had once been a man, and even since that epoch the wide sphere of his duties had compelled him to remain cognizant of many manly failings to which he would fain (he frequently declared) have been oblivious. A certain species of shock which this vision in cap and apron gave to his own system, warned him immediately that he was in presence of an insidious danger to others. He watched her very carefully indeed as she bent with entirely superfluous grace and offered the tray to his relative. He saw Irwin first drop his spoon in a kind of nervous paroxysm, then pick it up with singular awkwardness, and finally throw a kind of sheepish smile up at the delicate face that bent over him. He could almost swear he saw a

flicker of a smile on her lips too, and had no doubt at all that immediately afterwards her eyes met the Episcopal stare for one brief moment, and that her color rose slightly but perceptibly beneath its piercing scrutiny. Then she left the room.

He drank his coffee very thoughtfully, ruminating in silence for several minutes after she had gone. At length he remarked:

"I have not seen that girl before, Irwin."

He noted that Irwin started out of a reverie. "What was that reverie about?" he said to himself; for his powerful mind put two and two together instantly.

"No—no, I suppose not, Cousin Bedford."

His lordship watched him closely as he made the further observation:

"I do not quite know that I approve of her appearance."

His investigations were again rewarded. With more animation than he had exhibited for some time, Irwin replied:

"She is a particularly—really an especially nice girl, I assure you!"

"Ahem!" coughed the Bishop. "Does your dear wife hold the same remarkably high opinion of her?"

"She—er—did," said Mr. Molyneux with a little hesitation.

"Ah!" said the Bishop. "And what, may I ask, has occurred to make her alter her opinion?"

"Oh—ah—a mere—a mere domestic trifle," ex-

plained Irwin awkwardly. "Harriet took a somewhat severe view of a very venial offence, and—er—in fact, I'm sorry to say Eva is leaving us."

"Against your own desire, I gather?" inquired the Bishop, laying a slight but distinct emphasis on "desire."

"Yes—yes: I was decidedly averse to losing her."

"Did this happen recently?"

"Only this morning," said Irwin incautiously.

"Immediately before your dear wife departed on this mysterious errand?" exclaimed his lordship.

At the mention of his wife's movements Mr. Molyneux seemed to be seized with a fresh spasm of discomfort.

"Er—more or less, Cousin Bedford."

His distinguished relative looked at him in a manner that was neither likely nor intended to decrease his embarrassment.

"Good Heavens!" he said to himself. "It is indeed fortunate I decided to spend the night here!"

For the rest of the evening he said little but thought much. When at last he went to bed, he made this curious remark:

"By the way, Irwin, I generally sleep with my door open and am easily disturbed by any sounds in the house. Good-night."

VI

BREAKFAST at 47 Hyacinth Road upon that fateful morning was enlivened by remarkably little conversation. But though both Irwin Molyneux and his distinguished guest were silent, their conduct in every other respect forcibly illustrated the difference between an easy and a guilty conscience. Irwin toyed with his tea, trifled with his toast, and made the most miserable attempt imaginable to swallow a few poor mouthfuls of bacon. The Bishop drank two brimming cups, fell twice upon the bacon, added an egg to his trophies, and left the toast rack a mere skeleton of silver.

After breakfast his lordship took the *Times* into the library, and, with his eye occasionally wandering to the clock, awaited the hour at which his missing hostess was expected to return. Mr. Molyneux meanwhile murmured an apology, and disappeared for so long that his relative began to consider his absence additional proof of a disordered conscience. He knew he could not be reading the morning paper, since he himself had appropriated it. What excuse, then, could there be for his conduct?

At 10:45, Mr. Molyneux returned to the library. The Bishop heard him pause for several seconds outside the door, and when at last he entered, his manner was the worst conceivable blend of nervous-

ness and overdone assurance. In his hand he held a telegram, and in a hurried voice read out, without preamble, this communication:

"Do not expect me till to-morrow; unavoidably detained. HARRIET."

"Is that from your wife?" inquired the Bishop.

"From my wife—yes," answered Mr. Molyneux.

"I must confess that this strikes me as somewhat strange," said the Bishop, with his most formidable stare.

"Not at all, not at all; she—er—often stays away like this," said Mr. Molyneux hurriedly. "I'm only sorry you will not see her. I—er——"

He visibly quailed beneath that searching glance, and, hastily crumpling up the telegram, threw it at the fire, murmured something about having to look for green flies in the conservatory, and disappeared once more. But unfortunately for Irwin Molyneux, his crumpled telegram, instead of reaching the flames, had struck the bars of the grate, and bounced back on to the hearth. The Bishop rose slowly, and with the deliberate manner of a man doing a thoroughly justifiable act, picked it up and unfolded it. Instead of the message read out by his unhappy relative, these words met his startled eyes:

"Regret cannot lunch with you to-day; am writing.—FLORENCE."

He glanced at the date; it was ten days old.

The Bishop of Bedford stood for several minutes

in the deepest thought, gradually and relentlessly coming to one of the most momentous decisions ever recorded in the annals of crime. At last—and still very deliberately—he put the telegram in the fire, and watched it crumble into ashes. Then he rang the bell.

"Kindly tell Mr. Molyneux that I desire to see him," he informed the charming Eva, without so much as the usual twinkle wherewith even the most austere were wont to pay tribute to her allurements.

When his host appeared he greeted him with calm yet terrible benignity.

"Irwin," he said in an almost dulcet voice, "I have a really very particular desire to see your dear wife before I go. There is no pressing reason why I should return home immediately. In short, I propose to remain with you till Harriet's safe return."

He threw upon the word "safe" the slightest possible emphasis, and, without troubling his host for a reply, resumed his study of the *Times*.

Mr. Molyneux shrank rather than walked out of the room, stood for a moment outside the door in the most abject despair, and then, with quick, uncertain steps, rushed down the basement stairs. At the foot he met Eva. Little anticipating how quickly she herself was going to be sucked into the dark vortex of mystery, she greeted her master with a humorous and even roguish smile.

"Do you want to see cook?" she asked demurely.

"Where is she?" exclaimed the distracted man.

"In her bedroom," smiled Eva.

Mr. Molyneux seized the handle of the door and shook it.

"Open the door!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

A voice—singularly cultured for a cook's—answered from within:

"I am dressing. What is it?"

"He won't go!"

"Who—the Bishop?" replied the voice in startled accents.

"The unspeakable old meddler says he is going to stay till my 'dear wife' returns!"

There seemed to be a trace of bitter humor mingled with the pathos in the essayist's voice. For a moment dead silence ensued; and then the voice again spoke.

"In that case you must simply tell him that you have got to leave town yourself, and regret very much you can't entertain him any longer."

"I am really dreadfully afraid that even so broad a hint as that won't move him," sighed Mr. Molyneux.

"Let him see you packing your bag. He can't remain then, surely."

"He can do anything that is preposterous and objectionable."

"Well, then, let him see you actually leaving the house!"

Mr. Molyneux pondered.

"My great difficulty is the initial stage, the conveying of the information," he resumed. "I regret

extremely that hitherto I have not more assiduously practised the art of prevarication. Really, I find infinite difficulty in inspiring him with conviction. He seems to know instinctively whenever I deviate from a literal statement of fact. My opinion of the intelligence of our clergy has risen greatly. At the same time it is dreadfully embarrassing for me. If I could only manage to cultivate a rather more limpid, and, so to speak, crystalline manner of presenting the statement I desire him to accept——"

The voice within interrupted his aspirations somewhat sharply.

"Surely you can make a limpid statement that you are going to leave the house?"

"I *might* make such a statement," Mr. Molyneux admitted; "but he would certainly want to know the reason of my departure."

"To join your wife, of course."

"In that case he would probably insist on accompanying me."

"Well, then, tell him it is your business, and not his!"

Mr. Molyneux sighed and pondered again. Suddenly he appeared to have an inspiration.

"I might leave a note telling him I *had* gone!" he exclaimed.

"Very well," said the mysterious cook; "do it like that, if you prefer. By the way, where will you go?"

Mr. Molyneux reflected.

"Some quiet hotel would be best. It would be

safer to stay away overnight. The possibility of my finding him still here on my too early return is too dreadful to contemplate. What is that hotel in Kensington where the Pearsons stay?"

"Ruckford's."

"I shall go there. Good-bye, my dear."

"Good-bye!" said the closeted voice.

About an hour later the Bishop of Bedford, now arrived at the obituary notices in the *Times*, was disturbed once more by the entrance of the disquieting maid. The justice of his suspicions was instantly confirmed by an indecorous hint of something resembling subdued mirth in her expression; whereat a fresh shock to his system made him more sensible than ever of the insidious danger lurking in that house.

She brought him a note upon a salver, and at the first glance he recognized his host's handwriting.

"Remain till I have read this," he commanded. Instinctively he felt that presently he might have to deal with this young person. And then he read this disquieting letter:

"My dear Cousin Bedford,

"I regret exceedingly to inform you that a sudden summons to the South of France has abruptly curtailed the pleasure which, as you know, I always take in your society. I need not trouble you with the details of the literary project which has necessitated my departure, beyond mentioning that very possibly I may be detained for a week or two. Pray accept my apologies for deserting you so hurriedly. I have even had regretfully to omit a spoken fare-

well, but I assure you that the urgency of the summons was such as literally to leave no time for this pleasant yet melancholy ceremony.

"You will find an excellent train leaving St. Pancras at 12:55. To the best of my belief a restaurant-car is attached (though I observe that the time-table has omitted to mention the fact); and in my confidence that this is indeed the case I find my only consolation for not being able to ask you to stay and partake of luncheon.

"With all kind greetings to the little ones at home, believe me—Yours very sincerely,

"IRWIN MOLYNEUX."

Eva's eyes watched him furtively as he read, and by the time he had finished there was so much majestic indignation apparent in his countenance that the last vestige of her mirth entirely vanished.

"Then Mr. Molyneux has gone?" he inquired in a voice that vibrated with displeasure.

"Yes, my lord," she answered, shrinking a little beneath so formidable a gaze.

He noted her discomposure, and his frown deepened.

"He tells me he had not even time to say farewell."

"Yes, my lord."

"Ah!" exclaimed the justly incensed prelate. "Then you were aware of the contents of this letter?"

"I gathered them from what you said yourself," she replied, with spirit.

The Bishop detested spirit in those whom it was his purpose to rebuke.

"Indeed?" he replied, fixing his eyes on her till her own fell. This feat appeared to afford him a certain grim satisfaction. He even smiled sternly as he remarked, "And yet he had time to compose this letter? Thank you, that will do."

When she had gone he stood for a moment frowning. Then he strode to the telephone.

"Four-double-o-City."

He waited with the receiver at his ear. When he next spoke his voice was ominous, indeed.

"Is that Scotland Yard?" he demanded.

VII

Eva quietly ascended the basement stairs. She reached the hall, and paused before the library door in an intent and listening attitude. Then she entered and went straight to the further end of the room, removed a flower-pot from the top of a bookcase, and retired.

On the surface it seemed a very business-like and natural proceeding; yet it did not convince the Bishop of Bedford. He felt certain that her eyes rested longer both upon him and that enthralling novel, *Jambes et la Femme,* with which he was now relaxing his mind, than was either necessary or proper. He even suspected she was so wholly debased as to be aware of the salacious nature of that work of genius. The very fact that she had entered so suddenly as to preclude the possibility of his stuffing it beneath the *Times* (which lay conveniently upon his knee) lent additional color to his suspicions.

His lordship's worst fears would have been confirmed could he have seen her behavior when the door closed between them. She did nothing with the flower-pot but place it on the hall table, at the same time exclaiming:

"He doesn't show a sign of going away!"

And then she went upstairs with a thoughtful and somewhat disheartened air.

But a few minutes afterwards, had he been able to keep that watch upon her which he instinctively felt to be necessary, he would have witnessed still more remarkable conduct. Glancing idly out of the window of her mistress' bedroom, her eyes fell upon the figure of a young man strolling slowly along the opposite pavement. Over the top of the brick wall she could only see him as far down as the waist, and everything in that section of the gentleman seemed to the ordinary eye eminently satisfactory. His silk hat gleamed resplendently, his tie was the perfection of taste, his morning coat was cut to a miracle, and his features were singularly engaging; yet after a moment's horrified stare she shrank back as though she had been struck.

"Francis!" she murmured.

Cowering behind the curtain, she continued to watch him with the most passionate attention. He was gazing up longingly at the windows, and he walked so slowly that it seemed to her as if he meant to spend all day in this employment.

"He has discovered where I live!" she said to herself. "I must fly—fly instantly!"

And, turning from the window, she ran downstairs trembling. But a worse ordeal was yet to come. She had not quite reached the kitchen when the front-door bell rang. For a moment she feared she was going to faint. Leaning against the wall, she endeavored to collect her wits and devise some means of escaping the imminent disclosure. The bell rang again.

"Eva!" said the voice of the cultured cook. "There goes the front-door bell."

On leaden feet she approached the door. There was nothing else for it: she tried to steel her heart to face the worst.

"Why wasn't I honest with him before? He will never forgive me now!" she cried despairingly.

She opened the door, and stood with downcast eyes, not daring to raise them higher than the visitor's boots (which, despite her extreme agitation, she noticed were decidedly stouter than Lord Francis usually wore).

A few seconds passed in dead silence, and then a man's voice said:

"Is the Bishop of Bedford in?"

She started violently and looked up. An unobtrusively dressed and quiet-looking stranger stood upon the steps. He was of middle height, bull-necked, square-shouldered, straight-backed, and bearded; everything about him was deliberately inconspicuous except his eyes. These were set somewhat close together, and were at that moment concentrated upon her, like the two barrels of a gun, in the most searching and penetrating gaze. Evidently he had been studying her flushed face and trembling form ever since she opened the door. For a moment she could not control her voice, and it was clear that he made a note of this symptom also.

"Yes," she murmured.

The stranger took off his hat and entered.

"What name shall I say?" she inquired more steadily.

"Inspector Bray from Scotland Yard," he replied in a quietly menacing voice, and with a sudden glance to notice the effect of this intelligence. He was rewarded by observing a fresh start; though it is improbable that he exactly divined her thoughts.

"What has the Bishop been doing?" she wondered.

A moment later she was carrying the startling news downstairs.

For the better part of twenty minutes the Bishop and Inspector Bray were closeted in earnest conversation. Once Eva stole up and listened for a moment outside the door, but the two voices were carefully lowered, and she found that the key-hole had been plugged with the Inspector's handkerchief. She retired with growing apprehension. The hope of seeing the Bishop removed in handcuffs waned; the circumstances, in fact, began to point to some much less satisfactory conclusion. The bulletin she brought down this time was decidedly disquieting.

At length the door opened; and their steps were heard first in the hall, and then descending the basement stairs. Fortunately, the politeness of the Inspector in insisting upon the Bishop taking precedence of him made their approach exceedingly deliberate, or the most sensational mystery of modern times would probably have been ruined at the very outset. As it was, a faint swish of skirts and the

stealthy opening and shutting of the back door might have been heard in the gradual course of their descent had not his lordship's footfall been heavy and his breathing sonorous. Upon reaching the basement floor the Inspector took the lead.

"We shall begin with the kitchen," he said in a guarded voice.

He pushed the door open gently; and the Bishop, infected by his example, followed him on tiptoe. What horror he expected to find can of course only be guessed: what they actually found was the solitary figure of Eva, apparently engaged in some commonplace domestic work.

"Ahem!" coughed the Inspector sternly.

The girl looked round.

"Are you alone?" asked the Inspector.

"Yes," she said.

"Where is the cook?"

"It is her day out," she replied glibly, and to all appearances correctly, for there certainly was no sign of her fellow-servant.

"Where does this door lead into?"

"The scullery," she answered.

He passed into the scullery.

"And this door?" he demanded.

"Into the coal-cellar."

The Inspector struck a match and carefully examined the coal-cellar. He even took a shovel and dug several feet into the coal, watched intently by the breathless Bishop. The investigation resulted in the discovery of two hair-pins, which the Inspector

carefully placed in his waistcoat pocket. They then returned to the kitchen.

"Show me your bedroom," said the Inspector, more sternly than ever.

The girl conducted them to a fair-sized room containing, among other less important things, two beds, a hanging wardrobe, and an empty trunk.

"Do you and the cook both sleep in this room?" asked the Inspector.

She said they did, and was then dismissed; the Inspector shutting the door behind her and again carefully plugging the key-hole. The Bishop by this time was trembling with excitement.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Inspector in a muffled voice.

He took from the hanging wardrobe a lady's dress. "This is not the dress of a cook!" he whispered.

"It belongs to Mrs. Molyneux; I have seen her in it often!" exclaimed the Bishop. "Good Heavens! What is it doing here?"

They looked at one another, and the Inspector's face grew more inscrutably grave than ever. He replaced the dress in the wardrobe, removed the handkerchief from the key-hole, opened the door, and called Eva.

"What are those doors?" he asked.

"Cupboards," she said; "one is used as the wine-cellar."

"Another cellar!" murmured the Bishop, with a slight shudder. He knew too well what one was likely to find in cellars. The Inspector tried the doors; they were locked.

"Where are the keys?" he demanded.

She shook her head.

"I don't know," she said.

The Inspector merely smiled.

"Then we must pick the lock," he said, and drew from his pocket a leather case containing a series of neat nickel-plated instruments specially devised for this purpose.

The Bishop likewise smiled; he felt that the case was indeed in competent hands.

In neither the first nor the second cupboard did they find anything that seemed to throw light on the mystery. There was, it is true, a somewhat unusual looking butter-dish in one, and an extraordinary collection of empty cardboard boxes in the other; but to the visible disappointment of the Bishop, the Inspector passed these by with slight attention. The Bishop began to be reminded of the obtuseness invariably displayed by the professional police in a certain famous series of detective stories. But when they opened the wine cellar, he quickly discovered that this celebrated force had been libelled.

"Not much to drink here, my lord," said Inspector Bray; "two and a half of champagne, one of port——"

The Bishop, staring over his shoulder, interrupted him with considerable emotion.

"Three small bottles of *Graves* and two of whiskey! Dear, dear me, I should never have ventured near this house had I known there was so limited a supply of——"

His lordship paused and looked as theological as he could on the spur of the moment. It had occurred to him that uncharitable persons might consider this comment a trifle too secular. But the Inspector viewed the disclosure in another light.

"Hardly looks as if the gentleman had intended to be staying much longer in the house; does it, my lord?" he remarked.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the Bishop. "Now that you speak of it, it certainly does not."

"Either that or he was coming near the end of his cash," added the Inspector.

"You are right!" said the Bishop. "I must congratulate you on your perspicacity. What a strange and lurid light this throws on Irwin Molyneux!"

The Inspector smiled inscrutably. Then, placing his lips close to his lordship's ear, he whispered:

"Have you noticed, my lord, that the girl has gone into her bedroom?"

"No! Good gracious, you don't say so?"

"Fact," replied the Inspector. "Hush, my lord!"

Swiftly and stealthily he dropped upon his hands and knees, crept to the bedroom door, and peered through the key-hole. Then suddenly springing up, he opened the door and rushed in, followed headlong by the Bishop. Eva was in the act of packing her trunk.

"Allow me," said the Inspector, and paying no attention to her indignant protest, he searched the trunk with the dexterity of a customs official.

"Aha!" he exclaimed.

He held up a dark blue leather jewel-case, and, opening it, displayed a magnificent pearl necklace.

"How did you come by this?" he demanded.

The girl regarded him with calm disdain.

"Is that any business of yours?" she asked.

"It is," replied the Inspector grimly. "How did you get it?"

"I absolutely refuse to tell you."

He turned to the scandalized Bishop.

"My lord," said he, "I must ask you to look at this with extreme attention."

My lord looked, and then bent on the girl an excommunicating eye. The Inspector resumed:

"Now, my lord, can you tell me whether you recognize this as the property of Mrs. Molyneux?"

Eva and the Bishop seemed equally startled by this terrible question.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the Bishop. "I—ah—yes, Inspector, I can almost swear to it. In fact, I do swear to it!"

The girl turned upon him without the least appearance of respect either for his cloth or his rank.

"That is either a deliberate untruth or else it shows that you are utterly incapable of noticing what a woman wears," she said. "I am ashamed of you!" And then, turning to the Inspector: "That was given to me by a gentleman."

"When?" asked the detective.

He noted her color rise.

"Yesterday," she said.

"By a gentleman yesterday!" exclaimed the Bishop. "Why, bless my soul——"

The Inspector took the liberty of interrupting him.

"What is the gentleman's name?" he demanded.

"I refuse to tell you."

"Ah!" said the Inspector, and replacing the necklace in the case, slipped it into his pocket. "I think, my lord," he added, "that we may now go upstairs again."

"But my necklace!" cried Eva.

"If it is yours, you will get it by applying at Scotland Yard," he replied coldly, as he followed the horrified prelate out of the room.

They confronted one another in the library.

"Do you need to ask the gentleman's name, my lord?" said the Inspector significantly.

The Bishop sombrely shook his head.

"Scarcely, Inspector, scarcely. Good Heavens, that Irwin Molyneux should have fallen so low! And where, do you suppose, is his unfortunate wife?"

The Inspector looked graver than ever.

"My lord," he said, "I shall refrain from harrowing your feelings by even suggesting the almost inevitable conclusion. Good-morning, my lord."

He was gone, and the Bishop sat for a moment too stunned to move. Then he leapt up desperately, rushed to his room, and threw his things hastily into his bag; and a few minutes later the first cab drove swiftly away.

At the foot of the back garden of No. 47 stood a small summerhouse, secluded behind a group of laurels. Even while the Bishop was packing, a female form, shrouded in a cloak, emerged from this and ran hurriedly into the house. A quarter of an hour later the second cab drove away. In it sat the suspected Eva, and beside her the same cloaked and matronly female form.

"Ruckford's Hotel!" she said to the driver in an agitated voice; and then, to the equally moved Eva, exclaimed: "Whatever can have happened?"

Eva made no reply. Her eyes were fixed on a figure walking down the road, and she shrank further and further into her corner of the cab, as though she would have hidden herself in the cushions if she could. Swiftly they overtook the figure. He was going in the same direction. Would he look round? They whizzed past him, and the next instant her sigh of relief that he had not looked was changed into a sharp pang of regret. He might have looked up when she was passing him, she thought. Seeing that her companion was lost in thought, she opened the flap of the little window at the back and peeped out. For one moment she saw his face plainly, and then they swept round a corner.

"Good-bye!" her heart called out.

VIII

In that district of London anciently known as Whitefriars, there stands (as all acquainted with the snappy side of journalism are aware) the offices of the *Evening Tribune:* a vast edifice of yellow brick, devoted, from roof to cellar, to brightening the lives of Englishmen.

In the dusk of that same October day, the usual line of distributing carts entirely filled the narrow lane which bounded one side of this building, waiting the appearance of a fresh edition; within great white-walled rooms the machinery buzzed and clattered, pouring forth sheet upon sheet moist with startling or instructive items; while up in the editor's office, like a captain in his conning-tower, sat Mr. Cadbury, the presiding genius of this great enterprise. Like many other of the colossal figures who organize the daily campaign against ignorance, Mr. Cadbury had the great man's characteristic modesty of appearance, choosing to show himself to the world as an attenuated figure, with what might almost be termed a squeaky voice, and a nose that, throughout the winter months, required the most vigilant attention.

"Come in!" he squeaked: or perhaps it would be more decorous to say, "he shrilled."

The door opened and a young man presented him-

self. In his case nature had been more candid. One could see at the first glance that he was a person of intellectual, and probably literary, eminence. His small stature and large head, his spectacled eyes, somewhat dishevelled hair of a conspicuous auburn hue, and remarkably confident manner stamped him immediately. Since he was destined to play a part of some importance in this strange series of events, a few words of introduction are desirable.

James Buffington's gifts were first revealed in his early boyhood when, first with the disapprobation and then with the encouragement of his parents, he discovered a singular knack of guessing conundrums and solving acrostics. In the prize competitions of various popular periodicals he won eleven musical boxes, three grand and five cottage pianos, two week-end trips to Paris, and four to London, and (what ameliorated his parents) a five-room freehold residence, standing in a quarter of an acre of garden. Fond of music and travelling though he was, he soon found that enough was even better than a surfeit, since by converting the duplicates into cash he became the possessor of a very tidy bank-account. But a greater and more permanent benefit conferred upon him by his gift, he discovered when he made his first essay in journalism.

In the more elusive and fascinating problems presented by all classes of crime (especially the gory and the passionate varieties) the Press at that period was beginning to be treated, not as an enemy, but as an ally by the authorities, and a few earnest workers

like James Buffington soon made its assistance indispensable. As with the superfluous pianos, Buffington quickly reaped the benefit of his skill, not merely in reputation, but in salary. It is no breach of confidence to mention that, in addition to his regular emoluments as a member of the *Evening Tribune's* staff, he received a bonus of £20 per week per crime; that is to say, he was paid £20 during each week that his masterly investigations enlivened the columns of the *E. T.*, together with an extra bonus of £25 if he was instrumental in suggesting a correct solution of the mystery; which, for a young man living in Bloomsbury, may almost be described as opulence.

The conversation between these two eminent journalists was characteristically business-like and to the point, and was tinged with a flavor of mystery that enhanced the significance of their remarks.

"Well?" inquired Mr. Cadbury.

"Got a winner this time!" said Buffington, with an air in which enthusiasm struggled with the grave reticence appropriate to the theme. "More sensational even than we hoped!"

"Worth booming?"

"Boom till you bust," said Buffington emphatically.

"Did you find the police in the house?"

"Just arrived. I saw Bray: got enough facts to go on with, and a couple of photos—mistress and maid."

He threw them down on the deck as he spoke, and

the editor scanned them with the keen eye of an expert.

"Which is which?" he asked.

"Didn't stop to ask—facts perfectly obvious—that's the mistress—real lady—no mistaking her," said Buffington briefly, pointing to a portrait of a fashionably-hatted and charming girl.

"Good lord!" exclaimed the editor. "Do you mean to say he preferred the other?"

The other portrait represented a middle-aged female wonderfully refined and of an intellectual type, but infinitely less fashionable and distinguished. Behind his spectacles, Buffington's eyes gleamed with professional ardor.

"Perverted appetite, my dear sir! The most fascinating case I've come across for years: the particulars are unique, Cadbury, absolutely unique!"

Mr. Cadbury began to catch something of his colleague's enthusiasm.

"We must get these into the last edition," he said, fingering the photographs almost affectionately. "And let's have a good line for the posters, will you—something to make 'em prick up their ears."

"Trust me," said Buffington.

For a moment Mr. Cadbury mused intently, his eyes still gloating on the photographs. Then he said with decision:

"We must secure sole rights in the house, Buffington."

"I've spoken to Bray—it'll be all right if you 'phone at once. By the way, the *Something-for-all-*

of-You people are after it too. What about taking them in with us?"

The editor reflected for a moment.

"They're monthly," he said. "We won't clash, and it'll split the expense. I'll 'phone them first and then Scotland Yard. You start the boom going. We've kept two columns for you in this edition, and you can have five in the next if you like."

He turned to the telephone as he spoke, and James Buffington, like a hound hot on the scent, rushed out of the editorial office.

A little later the distributing carts started on their errand of mercy. Each carried a poster bearing, in the largest and boldest capitals, this legend:

"SENSATIONAL MYSTERY AT HYACINTH ROAD. WHAT HAS MOLYNEUX DONE WITH HIS WIFE? WE TAKE THE CASE IN HAND."

In the minds of none who knew the *Evening Tribune* and its methods could there be any doubt at all that whatever Molyneux had done in the past (and one feared the worst), he would not disappoint them now?

IX

Mr. Harbottle Smith, Fellow of All Souls' College, Oxford, and Lecturer upon Assyrian History in that venerable university, happened to be staying at Ruckford's Hotel, Kensington.

He was leaving by the Continental express from Charing Cross that evening, and till the hour of his departure arrived, endeavored to distract his mind by glancing through the illustrated periodicals. Compared with the literature of Assyria, they seemed to him to be edited with so little discrimination that he was already beginning to feel an increasing sense of boredom, when a gentleman, evidently newly arrived at the hotel, looked for a moment through the glass door of the reading-room. Mr. Harbottle Smith jumped up.

"Molyneux!" he exclaimed.

The gentleman started violently, and instantly vanished.

"Good gracious me!" said Mr. Harbottle Smith to himself. "Can I possibly have made a mistake? And even if I have, why need a man be so alarmed at merely being addressed by a wrong name? I myself distinctly remember being addressed as 'Harbottle Brown' on one occasion, and the mistake caused me no uneasiness to speak of. It is really a very singular episode."

On further reflection he was forced to admit that one who led so studious a life as himself was very possibly a bad judge of singular circumstances. Quite likely in so large and busy a city as London it was comparatively usual for gentlemen to start violently on being called Molyneux. This, of course, was only a theory; still, an Oxford don has to depend very largely upon theories in order to understand the phenomena of that complicated world which lies beyond his quadrangle.

Accordingly, with a comparatively tranquil mind, he passed to the consideration of the other question: Could he be mistaken as to the identity of the gentleman? It may be remembered that Irwin Molyneux had himself once held a Fellowship of All Souls' and Mr. Harbottle Smith used to know him well. True, they had not met for several years, but though this might be an excellent reason for Irwin Molyneux's appearance altering, it seemed no valid excuse for somebody else's appearance resembling Irwin Molyneux's. At last, with a flash of inspiration that pleased as much as it astonished him, he resolved to make inquiries at the office.

"Can you inform me," he asked, "whether a gentleman has just arrived at this hotel, and if so, what his name is? Somebody glanced through the reading-room door a few minutes ago; a gentleman with eye-glasses and a felt hat, and——"

The young lady interrupted him amiably, though briskly:

"Mr. John White," she said.

"Mr. John White? Then it can't be——" Mr. Harbottle Smith shook his head and returned to the reading-room with a thoughtful air.

It grew still more thoughtful a few hours later. Up till then he had seen no further sign of Mr. White, but now he was aroused by the sound of a voice so extraordinarily like Irwin Molyneux's that he found himself quite unable to resist the temptation of springing up and running to the glass door. Looking out into the hall he saw that a matronly lady had just arrived, accompanied by a remarkably attractive maid. Mr. John White was in the act of greeting them, and judging from their agitated manner and lowered voices, it seemed that they were exchanging disquieting news. First the lady overwhelmed Mr. White with some piece of evidently very startling intelligence; and then in turn he perturbed her by telling her something which resulted in their both glancing apprehensively towards the reading-room door. When their eyes fell upon the intellectual countenance of the Assyrian expert gazing through the glass with an expression of, so to speak, Chaldean surprise, Mr. White started even more convulsively than before, the lady lowered her veil, and they made hurriedly for the lift.

"Good Heavens!" said Mr. Harbottle Smith to himself. "That lady is as like Mrs. Molyneux as the man is like Molyneux. What an extraordinary affair!"

Once more he went to the office, and there with

deepening amazement learned that Mrs. John White had joined her husband.

"Something is going on of which I am not cognizant," decided the scholar. "It would be sufficiently surprising if there were two duplicate men called Molyneux and White, but I positively decline to believe that there can be two duplicate couples."

Meanwhile, Mr. and Mrs. White had found refuge in their room, and it became clear that the lady felt dissatisfied with the conduct of her mate.

"What on earth did you mean by registering a wrong name in the hotel books?" she demanded.

"My love," he replied, "I assure you I thought the matter over very carefully indeed before taking a step so foreign to my naturally accurate habits. It seemed to me that should that infernal, unspeakable Bishop——"

"My dear Irwin," she expostulated, "please remember that, with all his faults, he is a clergyman."

"That merely aggravates his offence!" cried her husband. "But what I was about to say was that should he discover I had not gone abroad, as I stated in my letter—well, my dear, he might make himself even more unpleasant."

"But why did you say you had gone abroad?"

"My love, I desired to be thorough, that was all."

"Well," she said, "you have let us in for all sorts of complications. Here, to begin with, is Mr. Harbottle Smith, who must be feeling extremely suspicious. We dare not leave our room now."

Mr. Molyneux sighed.

"One thing does seem to lead to another," he admitted.

The terrible truth of this adage they realized even more fully in the course of that evening. Unaware of the fact that Mr. Harbottle Smith had safely departed for Charing Cross *en route* for Mesopotamia, they spent several desolate hours immured in the bleakest of bedrooms, where Mrs. Molyneux, being a little unhinged by the events of the day, surrendered to the influence of the wallpaper and opened a depressing conversation by observing:

"I don't know whether you are aware that this is an extremely expensive hotel."

He endeavored to divert her thoughts.

"On the other hand, my love, it is quiet and comfortable. The literature, I confess, is deficient; but in any hotel——"

"We can no more afford this than we could afford to give the Bishop champagne!" she interrupted. "Irwin, I begin to think of the bankruptcy court as no mere figure of speech. Our bills are always increasing; and now Ruckford's Hotel on top of everything!"

"You take a somewhat gloomy view of things to-night, my dear," he said in his kindliest manner.

"Have you any idea how unpleasant our position can very easily become?"

He answered her with a sigh of the profoundest resignation. It was, in fact, the only answer he could think of to the greater part of her subsequent remarks; which chiefly treated of the same theme.

At length, just when they were contemplating with a pale gleam of satisfaction the prospect of terminating their discomfort in sleep, there came a knock at the door. There was something about this knock that made them start and look at one another apprehensively. It was so clearly the knock of one who was in haste; of one agitated with strong emotion down to the very knuckles.

"Who can it be?" he whispered.

"Go and see," she suggested.

Mr. Molyneux went on tiptoe (a strange gait for an innocent man), and turned the handle very gently. His voice broke slightly as he demanded:

"Who is there?"

"Me!" cried a guarded voice. "Eva!"

The girl entered bearing an evening paper.

"Oh, Mr. Molyneux!" she cried. "Look—look at this!"

At the top of the first page this legend, in the largest capitals, met their horrified eyes:

"SENSATIONAL MYSTERY AT HYACINTH ROAD."

"What Has Irwin Molyneux Done With His Wife?"

"Great Heavens!" murmured Irwin Molyneux, letting the paper fall from his hands.

His wife, with Spartan courage, picked it up and read on:

"A mystery promising to rival the darkest and most terrible dramas ever recorded in the annals of crime is at present in course of development at 47 Hyacinth Road, St. John's Wood. The police are naturally reticent on the subject, but in the course of a brief interview courteously granted to our representative by Inspector Bray, of Scotland Yard, it would appear that beyond any doubt a tragedy of the most ghastly nature has been enacted at the quiet and refined abode of Irwin Molyneux, M.A., Oxon. The motive is only too apparent, since it has been definitely ascertained that Molyneux's housemaid (a woman evidently possessed of singular physical attractions) decamped immediately after her master. Beyond a few articles of clothing no traces of her unfortunate mistress have yet been discovered, but excavations have already been commenced in the basement floor, and Inspector Bray is confident that they will very shortly be crowned with success."

After this interesting beginning, the account (which occupied an entire page) went on to narrate, first the events that immediately preceded the tragedy, and then the visit of Inspector Bray to No. 47; but though more brightly written than the present narrative, it covered so much of the same ground that it need not be quoted here.

For a few minutes Eva stood before them watching them read. Then in a low but firm voice, she said:

"You see what it says?"

Mr. and Mrs. Molyneux looked up.

"Terrible!" he exclaimed.

"Monstrous!" she pronounced.

"It means, of course, that I must leave you at once."

Mr. Molyneux seemed even more perturbed.

"Leave us at once?" he exclaimed. "But there is no hurry, I assure you; is there, Harriet?"

Mrs. Molyneux pursed her lips, and her eyes remained fixed upon the words, "Molyneux's housemaid (a woman evidently possessed of singular physical attractions)." Though renowned for her charity, she could not but think that there was something to be said for Eva's suggestion.

"We shall of course be sorry to lose you," she said. "But if you think it best for you, I shall not stand in your way."

"Good-bye!" said the girl.

Little thinking how dramatically she was to return into their lives, they bade her an affectionate farewell, and a few minutes later Eva left the hotel, and went out into the London night.

X

It was only the latest editions of the evening papers that had the startling news, but next morning all Europe and America were aware that Irwin Molyneux was no longer to be classed among men, but among monsters. The sensation will be vividly remembered by all who take an intelligent interest in crime; how *paterfamilias* declared he had always distrusted that type of man; how *materfamilias* made an inward vow never to engage a handsome lady-housemaid; how the children speculated as to whether he had done it with a pistol or a carving-knife; how the foreign journals drew morals regarding the state of domestic life in England; all this will be fresh in the reader's mind. He will recall the wild hope that it might fall to him to earn the reward of £500 offered for the apprehension of Irwin Molyneux, or even the more modest sum of £250 which recompensed the finder of Mrs. Molyneux's remains for his trouble. But there is one incident somewhat vitally connected with this memorable drama which he will now learn for positively the first time.

On that very morning, when all London was ringing with the news, a certain Mr. and Mrs. White left Ruckford's Hotel, Kensington, very unostentatiously, in a taxi-cab. The lady was so heavily veiled that her features were unrecognizable; while Mr.

White wore his felt hat at an unusual angle—upon the bridge of his nose, in fact. Few men of letters have ever cut a more suspicious figure, and had his conversation been overheard it would have done nothing to dissipate this impression.

"It is dreadful—dreadful!" he repeated. "All my life I have been haunted by a terror of getting into the newspapers; I have shrunk from publicity; notoriety has been my greatest aversion; and here I am with this appalling scandal attached to my name!"

The lady sat with compressed lips, looking resolutely before her.

"I am deeply sorry, Irwin," she said. "It is atrocious: but there is no use lamenting."

With increasing pathos the unhappy man continued:

"I had rather be accused of almost any other crime in the calendar! Burglary has recently acquired a certain specious halo of romance. Forgery and peculation are associated with the names of many eminent financial magnates. But murder, especially coupled with an insinuation of infidelity, is so entirely foreign to my tastes! It is the very last lapse of which I can conceive myself guilty! It is——"

"Not so loud," she said briefly. "The cabman may overhear you."

In a lowered voice, he resumed:

"Some steps must certainly be taken; some—some—— My dear, what can we do?"

"Be sensible," replied the lady. "It is the

only possible thing to do. Explain the situation frankly."

"But think of the ridicule in that case! Upon my word, my dear, I had almost rather be notorious than ridiculous."

"But you must give some explanation!"

Mr. Molyneux fell into a dejected silence. Presently he roused himself once more.

"Isn't it libellous?" he suggested. "Couldn't we—er—imprison somebody—or get damages?"

She also roused herself.

"Damages!" she exclaimed. "I wonder if it is possible? If we could get a really substantial sum, even this dreadful scandal would have its compensations."

This seemed to jar upon his sensitive soul.

"That seems a trifle mercenary, my love," he expostulated gently.

"Mercenary?" she replied. "Upon my word, men give things the most ridiculous names! Sordidness is as foreign to my nature as murder is to yours, but some one must look facts in the face."

By this time the cab had borne them eastwards till now they were passing through Piccadilly Circus. Both instinctively secluded themselves as far as possible from observation while traversing this centre. At Kelly's Library in Shaftesbury Avenue the cab stopped and Mr. Molyneux alighted. He entered and in a low nervous voice asked if there was anything for Mr. Felix Chapel. Ever since the extraordinary success of *Dark as Death,* its author had

called here once a week for letters addressed to him under this *nom-de-plume*. The procedure illustrated his excessive refinement, which, even with all these precautions taken, caused him many unhappy moments. This morning he came out carrying one letter. It was marked "Urgent," and he tore it open as he approached the cab. For a moment he stood on the pavement as if galvanized by some tremendous shock, and then opened the door like a man dazed.

"Where next, sir?" asked the driver.

Mr. Molyneux returned no answer, and the cab stood there while the lady in turn read the letter. It was headed by the well-known name of the *Something-for-All-of-You Magazine,* and its contents ran:

"*Dear Sir,*

"It has occurred to us that the sensational mystery at present in course of development at 47 Hyacinth Road, St. John's Wood, might prove of great interest to our readers if skilfully handled in a popular vein. We feel sure you would do this successfully, and we should have much pleasure in commissioning you to write us a series of from six to twelve instalments, treating the mystery as it develops in your well-known picturesque style.

"The terms we should offer would be £20 for each instalment of 4,000 to 5,000 words. We should also wish to secure the book rights, and for these should give you an advance of £200 upon a 17 per cent. royalty, rising to 20 per cent. after 3,000 copies are sold (thirteen counting as twelve).

"It is unnecessary to say that our readers will not de-

mand so much a literally accurate as an exciting and vivid account of the mystery and its solution. As our public includes many thousands of young people of both sexes we should suggest that you would do better to omit the more unsavory details in which the career of Molyneux seems to abound, while at the same time giving due prominence, in general terms, to the illicit element that characterizes the drama.

"In order to make yourself familiar with every particular of the case, we enclose an order to view the house, procured by arrangement with Scotland Yard. Should you wish to obtain the necessary atmosphere by residing for a few days at 47 Hyacinth Road, we have further arranged that you can be accommodated. The favor of an immediate reply will greatly oblige,

"Yours faithfully,

"G. FITZROY JONES,

"Editor."

"H'm!" mused the veiled lady with a thoughtful air.

"Isn't it awful?" groaned the essayist.

"Twelve instalments at £20 each makes £240, and a £200 advance makes £440," continued the lady.

"'Unsavory details!'" cried the unhappy man. "'Illicit element!' What the—er—devil do they mean?"

This was very strong language indeed for the polite essayist, and indicated a state of unusual emotion.

Suddenly the veiled lady bent forward with an animated and decided air.

"Irwin," she pronounced, "it is your duty to accept."

"*Accept?*" he shouted.

In the same tone of conviction she continued:

"Living in an intellectual circle has naturally not been conducive to orthodoxy; but a crisis like this makes one see things in a true light. This letter is clearly providential."

"You would actually have me accept?" he repeated with a dazed look.

"You know perfectly you cannot *afford* to refuse. Besides, think—you say you are afraid of being ridiculous. Well, when you receive that £440 for living in your own house and writing an account of your own disappearance, it won't be you who will seem ridiculous."

Mr. Molyneux seemed struck with this argument.

"True," he said. "And yet do you really mean it?"

"Certainly I do. We shall wire to this editor person at once. And there is a post office, almost next door! Irwin, you may be too clever to call this fresh coincidence providential, but you must at least admit that it is destiny. Be as quick as you can."

Like a man in a dream Irwin Molyneux entered the post office, his hat still upon his nose, his air more secretive than ever. When he reappeared he wore a look of less acute unhappiness.

"Since you wished me, I have sent the wire," he said in a voice which, though melancholy, had in it a distinct note of relief; "but as I have just thought

of an insuperable obstacle, I cannot say that your exceedingly objectionable project is very much more advanced."

"What is the obstacle?" she inquired.

"I shall be recognized instantly!"

"I also have been thinking over that point," she replied calmly; and put her head out of the window. "Cabman," she said, "there is a good theatrical costumier somewhere about Covent Garden, isn't there?"

"Yes, m'm."

"Drive there!" she commanded.

XI

In the gathering dusk a solitary man walked down the quiet and shady road off which branched the narrow cul-de-sac of Hyacinth Road. When he reached the corner of that once pacific and now notorious lane, he stopped short, apparently in a state of agitated indecision. A well-known local coal merchant, a belated nurse with her perambulator, and one or two other habitués of the neighborhood had already passed him and evidently decided at a glance that he was a mere stranger: though, strangely enough, on each occasion, he himself had shown symptoms, first of apprehension, and then of marked relief. Now that he had reached this corner, it was hard to say whether his indecision was the result of knowing too little or too much about the locality. He seemed at once familiar with it, and at a loss which way to turn.

The appearance of this individual was thoroughly satisfactory, seen in the setting of that artistic neighborhood. He wore a felt hat of the most delicate shade of green: beneath it his dark wavy hair trespassed a trifle upon his turn-over collar; his moustaches were long and also a little wavy; his waistcoat was white, and his trousers bagged slightly but not ungracefully at the knee. No man

of the world would have hesitated to describe him at the first glance as a writer of popular romances.

Every now and then as he stood there people would hurry past him, hasten up Hyacinth Road, and disappear round the bend. As he saw no one coming back, it was natural to conclude that a considerable assemblage must be concealed somewhere in the furthest recesses of the lane. Several times he seemed on the point of following these parties, but each time hesitated and desisted. At last, with a gesture evidently indicating some desperate resolution, he started in the wake of a stout elderly person who was accompanied by an excited lady. Yet even then he kept under the shadow of the wall, and walked so stealthily that it was perhaps fortunate for the peace of mind of the lady and her escort that they did not chance to glance over their shoulders.

When they rounded the bend, a remarkable sight greeted the party. A large crowd entirely filled the rest of the cul-de-sac, gazing with creepy fascination at the roof and chimney cans of No. 47; the green door was guarded by two policemen; and a thriving trade in postcards depicting the scene of the drama was being done by several itinerant merchants. Still following in the wake of the stout gentleman, the mysterious stranger was enabled to overhear this fragment of conversation:

"Have they found the body?" cried the lady to the nearest members of the crowd.

Five or six turned at once and supplied the desired information:

"In the hattics wrepped in a noospaper," said one.

"Copy of the *Toimes,* it were," added a second.

"*Dyly Myle,* I 'eard," corrected a third.

A grave superior-looking individual shook his head.

"I have it on the authority of one of the constables that beyond traces of a sanguinary struggle, nothing has been discovered yet," he said.

The stranger turned hurriedly away and made as though he would leave the spot, but after a few moments of further indecision he again moved into the fringe of the crowd. An intelligent and pleasant-looking young man made way for him, and encouraged by his appearance, the stranger inquired, in a refined, but curiously uneven voice:

"Do you know whether it is known where the occupant of this house has gone?"

"Meaning the murderer?" said the young man. "No, I wish I did know! They say he landed at Boulogne last night and was met by a motor car. That's in the very last edition of the *Evening Tribune.*"

"Thank you," said the stranger politely.

Again he turned away, and this time it was difficult to say whether he seemed more dismayed by the first part of the young man's answer, or relieved by the last. For a few moments he held a sharp debate with himself. Half aloud, he cried:

"I suppose I must risk it!"

And thereupon he pushed his way through the crowd, with an air as nearly reckless as could be conceived in a gentleman of literary appearance, till at length he found himself opposite the green door. There, to the vast excitement of the crowd, he was actually seen to accost a policeman and present him with a card.

"A 'tec, that bloke is!" ran the rumor.

"Or p'r'aps he's the undertaker," suggested one well versed in horrors.

Meanwhile the constable had opened the door and the mysterious stranger disappeared into the garden. With a hand that trembled palpably he rang the front-door bell. A constable in undress appeared and glanced at the card.

"This way, sir," he said, opening the library door.

The visitor found himself in the presence of two men. They sat by the table, each with a cigar in the corner of his mouth and the open box beside them. At the sight of it, he started a little, but said nothing. They were superior cigars and had been reserved by the late occupant for special occasions.

"Well, sir?" demanded one of the smokers, a small intellectual-looking man with a large head.

The other gazed at the intruder so fixedly out of a pair of close-set gimlet eyes, that his embarrassment became extreme. In a silvery voice and with the most academic enunciation he endeavored to explain.

"I have come," he said, "with a—ah—a species of letter of introduction: an order, to be perhaps more exact; an order to—er—view the house."

"It is not for sale," replied the gimlet-eyed man briefly.

"It is not for that purpose I have come," said the visitor hurriedly. "It is an order from Mr. Fitzroy Jones of the—er—something or other magazine; obtained, I understand, by arrangement with the—er—the name of the paper escapes me. Here is the order."

They glanced together at the card, and the short man exclaimed:

"Hullo, Felix Chapel himself!" And then turning to Mr. Chapel, "I've been expecting you, old man," he said. "I'm Buffington of the *E. T.* Let me introduce Mr. Chapel—Inspector Bray."

The Inspector bowed stiffly and Felix somewhat convulsively, and the brilliant young journalist continued:

"We've just been reconstructing the crime." (Their visitor started again, but again said nothing.) "You don't go to press for a fortnight, Chapel, so I don't mind you hearing our theories. Good bit of copy for you! You'll find whiskey in the decanter: help yourself."

He turned to the Inspector and with an earnest air resumed the discussion.

"I take the liberty of disagreeing with you on that point," he said emphatically.

Inspector Bray smiled slightly.

"You actually suspect he's still in the neighborhood?" he asked.

"Suspect?" said Buffington with a touch of rebuke. "I reason; I deduce: I do not *suspect*. I leave that to the police."

The Inspector pushed back his chair.

"In that case, Mr. Buffington, what's the use o' talking?"

He made as though he would rise, but Buffington eagerly detained him.

"My dear chap," he cried, "don't be so touchy! Come now, Inspector, just attend carefully to these few little facts." The expert's voice became exceedingly impressive. "Molyneux dabbled in literature; not sound journalism, mind you, but literature! He therefore possessed the diseased unpractical mind that alone can induce a man to follow such a calling. Now, persons of that profession are notoriously unable to resist temptation——"

"Those are ideas," interrupted the Inspector contemptuously, "and I mean to stick to facts."

"But they are facts! A literary man is a morbid man. Molyneux was perverted—unhealthy—a monstrosity? What does a monstrosity do when he has committed a murder?"

"Bolts for Spain," said the Inspector doggedly.

"The ordinary criminal, yes: but not the Molyneux type."

"Pooh!" muttered the Inspector.

"He will have sufficient cunning to know that London is the best hiding-place——"

"That's all my eye!" interrupted the Inspector. "I know lots of people think that; but I know it ain't true. We always catches 'em in London sooner or later."

"Ah, but my point is that Molyneux's artistic temperament will prevent him from realizing that. He will have the sense to hide in London but not sense enough to know he is simply putting himself in the hands of the police—if they'll only look for him in the right place."

"A very fine theory, Mr. Buffington!"

"It is the theory *I* intend to act upon." Buffington's voice sank almost to a whisper. "*First find the body!* Then watch it, and sooner or later his morbid impulses will impel him to return to it!"

The Inspector remained unmoved.

"Well," said he, "you can start looking for the body. I mean to nab the man."

It was Buffington's turn to smile.

"And where do you propose to look?"

"As soon as we get a clue I'll start looking fast enough. He's either gone or going abroad, you may take my word for it. And you may take my word for this too, Mr. Buffington, I can tell you what's going to happen to him! A rope round his neck, a drop according to his weight, and then——!" The Inspector made a sound and gesture that graphically completed the sketch.

It was at this point that the two experts were reminded of the presence of Felix Chapel.

"If you will excuse me, I think I shall go to bed," he said hurriedly.

"As you please, old man," said Buffington.

He noticed that his fellow journalist was extremely pale, though at the moment the fact merely suggested a life lived hard.

"You look a bit chippy," he added sympathetically. "Take my tip and try a hand of the dog that bit you."

He hospitably indicated the decanter, but Felix politely declined.

"You'll see one of my men on duty," said the Inspector. "He'll find a room for you."

"I know my way, thank you," said Felix, opening the door like one familiar with the premises.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Buffington with interest. "Have you been in the house before?"

Though his explanation was perfectly simple, Mr. Chapel poured it out with a breathless eagerness that surprised the experts.

"No, no; not in this house! I only mean they are so like each other in this road that one can scarcely be guilty of an error. I have friends—had friends, I mean—who lived—or rather, rented,—a very similar little house."

"I shouldn't trust to that," said the Inspector. "I happen to have noticed they are all shapes and sizes."

"Then," said Felix hastily, "I'd better make inquiries of your officer. Good-night."

As the door closed behind him, Buffington remarked:

"Rum bird!"

With that they dismissed the subject of Felix Chapel; but the mind of the trained investigator has a habit of preserving impressions for future use; a habit very dangerous to evil-doers.

PART II

THE SLEUTHHOUNDS

I

SOMEWHAT late in the evening Lord Francis Phillimore entered his club. He nodded and spoke to one or two acquaintances; though it was afterwards noted that he seemed singularly, but by no means unhappily, abstracted. He then picked up an evening paper at random, stretched himself in a chair in an isolated corner of the smoking-room, and letting the paper lie across his knees, gave himself up to meditation.

His thoughts ran vividly on his adventure of the day before and the glimpse he had snatched that morning of the house where his divinity dwelt. The secretive-looking lane, the small secluded villa, the high wall with its green door shut severely, the overhanging trees, impressed themselves strongly on his imagination. As a lover of Balzac, his fancy readily conjured up infinite possibilities of drama and romance in the recesses of that shady cul-de-sac. He began, indeed, to fear uneasily that romance might have visited such an ideal spot some time before he himself had made the acquaintance of his mysterious Marie. This thought so jarred upon his pleasant dreams that at last he shook himself out of his reverie

and picked up the paper on his knees. He noticed that it was the last edition of the *Evening Tribune*.

A few minutes later one of his acquaintances exclaimed in a guarded voice:

"Hullo, what's the matter with Phillimore!"

They looked at him with expressions unusually startled for so well-bred a party of young men. Lord Francis seemed to have received a mental shock of the most violent and staggering description. And apparently it was the result of something he was reading in the evening paper.

By gazing intently they could just see that the page on which his eyes were riveted contained several columns headed in large capitals by the words, "Mysterious Drama," and including in their midst two portraits. Then he suddenly sprang up, and without even looking at his friends, rushed out of the club. After his departure they, in turn, picked up the paper and spent an hour or more in wondering what particular interest Francis Phillimore could feel in the Hyacinth Road mystery.

Meanwhile the poor young man was pacing the London streets in a state bordering upon distraction. How far and where he rambled he himself never knew; grief, despair, and indignation so wholly filled his mind. But as this narrative is not, strictly speaking, a tragedy, we may draw a veil over his sufferings.

Among the many distinguished relatives of Lord Francis, perhaps the most distinguished was his

maternal uncle, the Marquis of Carraway. Being a fairly intelligent and very seriously-minded peer, he had risen so rapidly in the political world that by the age of sixty-nine he was now in the Cabinet, fulfilling the onerous duties of Home Secretary.

One morning, a few days later, his uncle was informed at the unreasonable hour of 8:30 that Lord Francis Phillimore desired to see him immediately.

As the statesman was at that moment secluded from the world for the most decorous of reasons, he answered through the door that Lord Francis would have to wait. To his surprise he heard the voice of his nephew himself reply in urgent accents, begging him to make haste.

"I certainly shall not see you till I am dry," said the Home Secretary severely; but with commendable good-nature he was seated in his dressing-gown within ten minutes, ready for the reception.

At the first glance he perceived a marked and disquieting change both in his nephew's appearance and manner. Though dressed as perfectly as ever, his suit and tie were alike so sombre as to suggest that he must be in mourning; while his melancholy air fully bore out that impression.

"What's the matter, Francis?" exclaimed his uncle.

The young man closed the dressing-room door behind him, and then in a subdued, but firm voice, said:

"I haven't asked many favors of you, uncle, and I hope you won't refuse me this one."

"It will depend on what it is," replied the statesman cautiously.

He was surprised afresh at the young man's next question.

"Have you heard of the dreadful affair at Hyacinth Road?"

"Hyacinth Road? Let me see—Yes, by the way, I think I noticed something in the papers. A woman has disappeared, hasn't she?"

"A lady has been foully murdered!"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Lord Carraway. "You don't say so!"

"I do, uncle; and I want your permission to investigate the crime."

Lord Carraway stared at him.

"I've often heard," he said, "that they don't overwork fellows in the Guards; but I had no idea you were as hard up for something to do as all that. My dear fellow, don't you golf?"

"I am not doing this for amusement," said the young man gravely.

Lord Carraway stared even harder.

"You seriously wish to—er—what precisely *do* you wish to do?"

"I wish to assist the police—or work independently if I prefer it—in the task of hunting down the murderer. And I want you, uncle, as Home Secretary, to introduce me, or recommend me, or whatever is necessary, to the people in authority at Scotland Yard."

"But, my dear boy," expostulated Lord Carra-

way. "I don't know that I can conscientiously 'recommend' you to Scotland Yard. What do you know about criminal investigation?"

"I have read a good bit about it; and if I may say so myself, I think I have rather a turn for putting two and two together. But I must say I think keenness and determination to track the scoundrel down are the chief things, and I can guarantee I've got those!"

Lord Carraway pursed his lips and regarded his nephew with an indication of disapproval.

"Francis," he said, "I know little about this case, but I am aware that there is a woman in it. Where there is one woman there may well be another. You display very unaccountable zeal——"

Lord Francis was the most candid of men, but he remembered that his uncle was as respected in ecclesiastical as in political circles, and he was perfectly aware that a hint of the truth would have been fatal to his request. He interrupted diplomatically.

"If I had any intention of doing what you suggest, you may be sure I should not approach you of all people."

Though he could not at the instant remember precisely what he had suggested, this assurance seemed to Lord Carraway quite satisfactory. Yet he still remained dubious.

"There is one very strong objection," he said after a minute's deliberation, "and that is that these journalists nowadays get hold of everything. It would be published abroad instantly that my nephew

was taking part in this investigation, and some very awkward questions would be asked in the House."

"But you sit in the House of Lords," said his nephew persuasively.

"That is no protection whatever," his uncle replied with a melancholy air. "In fact it is the reverse. It is like being a woodcock; absolutely everybody fires at you."

"But need my name be mentioned? Why shouldn't I go as——"

"No, no, my boy," his uncle interrupted, "I will have no false names!"

"I was only going to suggest 'Mr. Francis' as a kind of—well, merely as a *nom-de-plume*, uncle. I remember you yourself once writing to the *Times* under a *nom-de-plume*. 'An Anglican Peer,' you signed yourself."

Lord Carraway's face cleared.

"That might certainly get round the difficulty," he admitted. "As a younger son, you are no more than 'Mr.' in the eye of the law, and Francis is your name. I could not have been a party to deceit, but 'Mr. Francis' might do—Yes, it might possibly meet the objection. But what reason can I give to the police authorities?"

"Tell them you wish to be kept in touch with the investigation by an agent of your own; and then let them pass me off as a sort of detective fellow."

"Let me see," deliberated the statesman, "do I conscientiously wish to be represented? Well, now that you put it to me, I think I do. And as for

passing you off as a detective, well, that will be on the conscience of the Scotland Yard officials."

"And they have none!" exclaimed his nephew eagerly.

Lord Carraway frowned.

"Francis," he said gravely, "do not be cynical. It is unpopular in a politician, and unbecoming in a gentleman. And now, my boy, I must not be late for breakfast. I had better write this note at once."

A few minutes later Lord Francis emerged from his uncle's house with an air in which melancholy had given place to a sterner sentiment.

II

Lord Francis was not one of those men who air their hearts upon their sleeves. To only one of all his numerous friends had he confided the story of his romantic acquaintance with Marie; one on whose discretion and fidelity he could implicitly rely. From their schooldays he had enjoyed the wholehearted admiration and affection of Rupert Jellibrand. Each turned to the other instinctively when some exceptional help was needed, or some unusual confidence required an entirely devoted ear; and this morning Lord Francis bent his steps almost automatically towards Rupert's chambers.

He found him just sitting down to breakfast, a morning paper against the teapot and a bulldog beneath the chair.

"Hullo, Francis!" he cried. "Come to breakfast?"

Francis started slightly and answered, pointing to the paper:

"You are reading about it!"

Rupert turned in his chair and looked him gravely up and down. He was a bull-necked, fresh-colored, clean-shaven young man, with a considerable expanse of honest countenance, blue eyes, and a determined jaw; and a remarkably muscular frame. It was impossible to imagine a more suitable ally in an awk-

ward affair. If Francis had said to him "Knock me a hole in that wall!" he would have set to work as promptly as if he had said, "Be my best man." And one could have counted on the hole being at least large enough. Next to a Socialist, half-measures were Rupert's pet aversion.

"What's up?" he inquired comprehensively.

"Go on with your breakfast," said Francis considerately. "I'll tell you."

When Rupert said a thing he meant it, and he relied on equal honesty from his friends; so without any inattention to either bacon or eggs, he listened to his unfortunate friend's story. Once or twice he murmured suitably sympathetic ejaculations through a mouthful of toast, but he never interrupted till it was finished. Then he said:

"But I say, old fellow, this account makes Mrs. Molyneux the old bird and Eva Wilson the young 'un."

Lord Francis bent quickly over his shoulder and glanced at the paper. Then he merely smiled sadly.

"That's obviously to put the criminal off the scent," he said. "They often publish misleading information, I believe. Unfortunately I know the truth too well!"

"Ah!" murmured Rupert, "that must be the dodge of course. Deuced artful of 'em. Anything I can do?"

"Rupert, I've vowed to bring Molyneux to justice! Will you help me?"

Rupert's expression hitherto had been extremely

solemn. At this hint of action it cleared up amazingly.

"Run the fellow down, d'ye mean?" he exclaimed.

Francis nodded. His brow was bent and his lips set. Rupert derived fresh encouragement from these symptoms.

"All on our own, Francis?" he asked eagerly.

Francis drew a letter from his pocket.

"I have just been to see my Uncle Carraway. Here's a note from him written to the people at Scotland Yard, introducing me as Mr. Francis."

"What? a kind o' nom-de—what d'ye call it?" said Rupert delightedly. "Good business! I say, this is a bit of sport. We've had a go at grouse together, Francis; and pheasants, and lions, and rhinos, and snipe, but we've never been after a man before. What ought I to call myself?"

"You needn't change your name unless you like."

"It seems more sporting somehow," said Rupert meditatively. "Let me see now—oh, I have it; I'll be Mr. Rupert! When do we begin?"

"When you've finished breakfast."

"Only waiting for that? My dear old fellow, why didn't you tell me sooner?"

Half a slice of toast and marmalade vanished, and he rose, prepared for the adventure.

"How'll we begin?" he asked.

Francis lit a cigarette and considered.

"I haven't had time to plan it out yet," he said, "but it's quite clear that the first step is to present

this note and see if there is any new information that might help us. But I don't think, Rupert, we shall trouble the police much once we make a start."

"Good business!" said Rupert, pulling on his boots.

A few minutes later they drove off for Scotland Yard; but though they were received with all imaginable courtesy, they found that no fresh information was to be elicited.

"Well," said Rupert when they came out into Whitehall, "what's the next move?"

"We shall go to Hyacinth Road and have a look round. Something may strike us there. I don't believe in making plans till we have facts to go upon; and, hang it, we are sure to get a clue from the fellow's letters or papers or something!"

"Good business!" said Rupert; and hailing a cab, they set out for St. John's Wood.

During the drive both sat silent. Rupert was never in the habit of talking superfluously, and Francis was too filled with sombre reflections to feel any desire for conversation. He never spoke till they were turning into the shady lane. Then he said:

"This was where I last saw her!"

"Good business!" murmured Rupert; and then their cab stopped before the green door.

III

"THEN Inspector Bray isn't here?" said Lord Francis.

"No, sir, gone to the country, sir," said the constable.

"In connection with this case?"

"I believe so, sir," replied the officer guardedly.

(The Inspector was, as a matter of fact, following up a highly-promising clue; a man bearing the most remarkable resemblance to the hunted Molyneux having been seen the night before in a public house in the City of Exeter.)

"Is Mr. Buffington in?" inquired Lord Francis.

But he, it appeared, had gone to hold a consultation with Mr. Cadbury. The two adventurers consulted apart.

"There is certain to be something they have overlooked!" said Francis. "Let us search the place."

"Good business!" said Rupert.

Lord Francis entered No. 47 with a strange sensation. Here she had lived! And here she had—— He shrank from finishing that sentence, and with a sterner air opened the library door.

"You can leave us," he said to the constable.

They closed the door and looked round the room. Here, if anywhere, they thought, some scrap of evi-

dence might be found which should help them at least to start in the proper direction.

"Confound it!" exclaimed Francis. "The police have evidently locked up these drawers. I ought to have thought of that."

"Shall I open one?" asked Rupert.

"If you can——"

Hardly had he spoken before his ally had turned his back to the bureau and driven his powerful leg up to the knee in the middle drawer.

"Perfectly simple," he said modestly, as he tore aside the shattered woodwork and pulled out a handful of papers.

"Thanks," said Francis briefly, but with a note of appreciation that amply rewarded his friend.

Each took a bundle of papers and bent over them.

"Only bills!" said Rupert.

"One may learn something from bills," replied Francis. "At least I'd be uncommon sorry to have the police look through mine if I didn't want them to know my past sins."

"Something in that," agreed Rupert. "But I say, dear old man, these are rather rum-looking bills."

"They're receipted," explained Francis.

"Ah!" said his ally. "That probably accounts for it. I knew there was something rather unusual about them."

For a few minutes they rapidly unfolded and examined these documents. Presently Rupert inquired:

"Need we fold 'em up again?"

"He'll never want 'em," said Francis grimly. "The brute won't be alive much longer. You can tear 'em up."

And with that he tossed a handful of torn fragments into the waste-paper basket.

"Ahem!"

A refined but extremely nervous cough startled the investigators. Looking round they beheld an entire stranger in the doorway.

For a moment they looked at one another; in extreme surprise on their side and with a tincture apparently both of annoyance and alarm on the stranger's.

"Hullo!" said Rupert.

"May I venture to ask," inquired the visitor, "what you are doing with those bills?"

Lord Francis had moved little in literary circles, and to him this intruder's appearance merely suggested a ventriloquist with musical proclivities. At the same time, his voice was so cultured and his manner so well-bred that whatever his present occupation, he must clearly at one time have been a gentleman. He explained frankly and courteously:

"We are acting on the express authority of the police, and, in fact, I may add of the Home Secretary. I have the pleasure of addressing——?"

"Felix Chapel is my name," said the stranger bowing.

"My friend is Mr. Rupert; I am Mr. Francis. May I ask if you also are investigating this atrocious crime, sir?"

Mr. Chapel cleared his throat before replying and even then spoke somewhat huskily.

"In a—er—in a journalistic capacity," he said.

Lord Francis frowned. He had never met a journalist before and his father had frequently warned him against them. At the same time, as he had been brought up to show the most punctilious courtesy to his inferiors, he politely offered Mr. Chapel a chair, and in a few minutes his affability had placed him almost entirely at his ease. Even the curious and inexplicable concern with which Felix seemed to regard the broken drawer and torn bills was gradually dissipated, and presently they were talking on the most friendly footing.

It seemed as though Mr. Chapel on his part had originally entertained prejudices regarding the police. For presently he said:

"May I inquire whether you are engaged professionally in this investigation, Mr. Francis?"

There was something so charming and ingenuous in his manner that Francis felt impelled to give him his confidence.

"Frankly, Mr. Chapel," he said, "I am not. I am actuated simply by the very strongest private motives. I needn't trouble you with them at present; in fact I don't propose to trouble anybody; but in the strictest confidence I may tell you that my mission is not merely one of justice."

"Indeed," inquired Felix with considerable surprise; "what is it, then?"

"Vengeance!" exclaimed the young man, his man-

ner forcibly restrained and his eyes kindling. "I beg your pardon," he added considerately. "I didn't mean to startle you, Mr. Chapel; I am afraid my feelings rather carried me away."

"N—not at all," stammered Mr. Chapel; yet he continued to look at him with palpable discomfort.

"We mean to give the brute what for," put in Rupert, who had hitherto stared fixedly and in silence at their new acquaintance.

"Which brute?" inquired Mr. Chapel, in an uneven voice.

"Molyneux!" said Francis. "And since we are talking in confidence and you are not one of the official police, I may tell you that I don't mean to bring them into it at all if I can help it."

"Not the police?"

"No; I reserve Molyneux for myself. When I hunt him down—as I mean to—then——"

He broke off and strode across the floor in suppressed agitation.

"What then?" asked Felix.

Lord Francis drew from his hip pocket a small revolver. He tapped it significantly and replaced it in his pocket.

"And devilish lucky Molyneux will be," said Rupert with quiet ferocity. "It will be over too quickly for my taste."

For a moment Felix looked as if he were stunned; then in an earnest voice he cried:

"But, good Heavens, supposing he's innocent!"

"Innocent!" cried Francis, "that brute innocent! If he's innocent where is his wife?"

"She—er—she may not be actually—er—dead——"

The young man laughed bitterly.

"They have run away together perhaps!" he said sardonically.

"But—but—*if* you should happen to—er—catch him, you would at least give him a chance of explaining—surely, Mr. Francis?"

"Certainly," said Rupert grimly, "but we'd shoot first."

Mr. Chapel rose and moved towards the door.

"I—I am afraid you must excuse me," he said hurriedly. "I have some writing to do——"

The door opened in his face and the constable entered.

"Lady wishes to see you, gentlemen," he said.

"Lady?" gasped Felix.

"Name of Macpherson, aunt of late Mrs. Molyneux, she says."

"Aunt of Mrs. Molyneux?" exclaimed Lord Francis eagerly.

"Yes, sir."

"Send her away!" said Felix quickly. "Tell her——"

"Constable!" interrupted Lord Francis authoritatively, "show Miss Macpherson in here."

For a moment Felix Chapel seemed to hesitate whether to fly or remain. Then he sank into a chair and waited, with a look of the acutest misery.

IV

Two ladies entered the room. One was large and very old, the other smaller and middle-aged. In one hand the old lady held an ear-trumpet, with the other she leaned heavily on the arm of her companion. Her companion was clearly the younger lady's position; her expression though naturally severe was alleviated by a sympathetic smile whenever her patroness required one, and she assisted her to a chair with extreme solicitude. The old lady was evidently on the verge of an emotional disturbance, and both were sombrely attired in black. As soon as she was seated the elder lady gave a sudden convulsive sob. Her companion immediately provided her with a handkerchief, and then after soothing her for a minute, turned with a grave air to the three gentlemen.

"This is Miss Macpherson," she announced.

Francis and Rupert bowed, but Felix Chapel only started guiltily and looked at her askance.

"We are deeply sorry for you in your affliction, Madam," said Lord Francis, "we realize what you have lost, Miss Macpherson."

Miss Macpherson put up her ear-trumpet to her companion.

"What does the gentleman say?" she asked in a quavering voice.

"He says that he realizes your awful loss, dear," translated the companion.

Miss Macpherson sighed and shook her head mournfully.

"And she was to have been my heiress!" she said.

"Indeed, Madam?" replied Francis with grave suavity, advancing towards the trumpet as he spoke, and meanwhile raising his voice to a suitable pitch. "If you will allow me——"

But all of a sudden, with a frenzied burst of energy, Felix Chapel sprang up and hurled himself between them. Grasping the trumpet firmly with both hands, he spoke in a low voice and with a kind of broken fluency.

"My dear Miss Macpherson, I assure you there has in all probability been some terrible mistake—some extraordinary error. Before coming to any decision to—er—regard Mrs. Molyneux as being—er—ineligible for a place in your—well in your affections, and—er—well even in your will, please wait for a little longer. We are investigating—we are inquiring—things may not be as bad as people fear. I have reason to think—that is, I have reason to suspect that the truth is not yet fully known. She may be alive! Wait—wait a little longer and see!"

"Alive!" exclaimed Miss Macpherson, "is it possible? Do you really think so?"

"It is not only possible, Madam, it is even likely! I assure you! Wait for—er—a week—a fortnight!"

"Then, Eugenia," cried the old lady, turning to her companion, "that card may be from her!"

"Card!" exclaimed Lord Francis, springing forward again. "What card, Madam?"

As Felix still occupied the ear-trumpet Eugenia replied.

"Miss Macpherson received a postcard this morning of a very singular and mysterious nature."

"From whom?" cried the young man impetuously.

"If this gentleman would be kind enough to allow me to use the ear-trumpet——" said Eugenia.

But Felix clung to it as though it were his last hope on earth.

"I can make all the necessary inquiries," he said, "if you kindly explain what you require to say——"

"This card!" exclaimed Francis. "Find out what she means."

In an agitated voice Felix inquired. The old lady opened a handbag and drew out a postcard with trembling hands.

"It came this morning," she said, "and gave me such a turn! Oh, such a turn! Eugenia will you read it to the gentlemen?"

Eugenia read:

"'Do not be alarmed. I am still alive.' That is all that is on it. Miss Macpherson has been in the most dreadful state ever since. She would insist on coming to this house to see if the poor lady really had come back. What can it mean? Who can it be from? Not from Mrs. Molyneux, surely?"

Lord Francis had already taken the card and was

studying it closely. Now he turned suddenly to Felix.

"That trumpet, please!" he commanded.

"If you have anything to say——" protested Felix.

He was interrupted with vigor amounting almost to violence. Seizing Felix in one hand and the trumpet in the other, Francis literally tore them apart. Then with a resolute air he settled himself down by Miss Macpherson's side.

"My dear Miss Macpherson," he began in a grave and soothing voice, "do not be alarmed."

Lord Francis had always been a great favorite with old ladies. He possessed to perfection that deferential yet smiling tact which wins for its fortunate possessors so many legacies and eligible daughters. "I could trust my Lucy with *him*," had thought many a mother ere now; and it was said by his friends that if he chose to exercise his gift nefariously, Francis could have appeared in the codicils of half the wills in England. Hardly had he begun to speak before Felix realized that the trumpet had passed, perhaps forever, from his custody.

"That card," he continued, "is *not* in the handwriting of the late Mrs. Molyneux."

"Are you sure?" cried Miss Macpherson. "I thought it seemed rather like her hand."

"Unfortunately I am certain," he replied with conviction.

"I was sure it was not!" cried Eugenia triumphantly; and Felix with a sinking of his heart realized

also that there was probably another candidate for Miss Macpherson's thousands.

"Then who is it from?" asked the old lady.

"I think I can answer that with equal certainty. Now, my dear Miss Macpherson, please do not be agitated when I tell you that that card was written by the woman Wilson, and was dictated by the man Molyneux himself. There, there!" (He patted her hand kindly.) "It is a dreadful thought I know, but we must no longer regard the villain as in any way connected with you. Be thankful that there is now no danger of his benefiting by your generosity!"

"Ah, indeed yes!" sighed Eugenia sympathetically.

"The explanation of the card of course is simple," continued Lord Francis. "Molyneux still hopes to obtain for himself that share in your estate which his wife would have enjoyed. Hence his endeavors to persuade you that she is still alive. I don't know the law on the subject, and probably no more does he; but that this is his intention is surely perfectly obvious, isn't it?"

"The dreadful creature! Of course—of course, that is what he has done. But," she continued with a wonderful recovery of energy, "I can assure you, young man, that never will Irwin Molyneux get a penny of mine!"

She looked at Francis benevolently.

"What did you say was your name?" she inquired.

"Mr. Francis," he replied, blushing slightly at the innocent deception.

"Will you come and see an old woman, Mr. Francis?"

A little embarrassed he assured her he would.

"Miss Macpherson, Hendon House, Rackstraw Road, Hampstead Heath is my address," she said. "Thank you very very much for your kindness, Mr. Francis!"

Lord Francis politely escorted her to the door. When he returned to the library he found Felix Chapel sitting in an attitude of dejection amounting almost to stupor, and Rupert wreathed in smiles.

"I back you for the old girl's money, Francis!" he cried genially.

Felix Chapel started for a moment out of his stupor and then relapsed again.

"Come on, Rupert!" said his leader, with an air of suppressed excitement, "let's be off!"

"What; shan't we do any more looking for clues?"

"Not here," said Francis significantly. He turned to Felix Chapel and said kindly, "Good-bye, Mr. Chapel; your standing up for that rascal does your heart credit, but you may take my word for it he is the worst scoundrel alive in England at this moment!"

"Which he won't be for long," added Rupert.

They were gone, and then with an effort Felix Chapel roused himself from his torpor, rushed to the writing desk, and seized his pen.

Meanwhile the two young men hurried out into Hyacinth Road.

"What's the game now?" demanded Rupert.

"I spotted the postmark on the card!" cried Francis. "It was posted at Hammersmith!"

"Good business!" said Rupert.

V

"LOOK at it carefully," said Francis.

"I'm looking," said Rupert.

"Got her well into your head?"

"I'd spot her anywhere."

They were standing near the booking office of the Hammersmith Tube Station, carefully studying a newspaper cutting. It contained the *Evening Tribune's* conception of Eva Wilson's appearance; the portrait which had adorned the first evening's account of the tragedy. It was as a matter of fact a wonderfully creditable likeness of the late Mrs. Molyneux as her sorrowing friends had known her, labelled in large type "The woman Wilson." They gazed at it with minute attention, each endeavoring to form such a clear mental image of the adventuress that she should not pass them unobserved even in the most crowded thoroughfare. Then Francis returned the cutting to his pocketbook and they went out into the street.

"What a deuce of a crowd!" exclaimed Rupert. "I thought people only went to Hammersmith to see the boat race. What are they all doing here today?"

"People must live somewhere," explained Francis.

"St. James's Street is good enough for me," said Rupert, "but I suppose there's no accounting for

tastes. I say though, this'll make it rather difficult to spot the woman."

"We must walk very slowly and keep a sharp look-out. You take the other side of the street and I'll take this, and we'll go on till we're hungry."

"Is there much country to cover?"

"A goodish bit," said Francis, "but we've got to cover it, Rupert."

"Good business!" said Rupert cheerfully.

Francis had bought a map showing the boundaries of Hammersmith, and he realized more clearly than his friend the arduous nature of their task, but though they went through street after street for three long hours, studying every female over forty without seeing anybody at all resembling the portrait of the woman Wilson, his resolution to search till he had found her never for an instant wavered.

Unostentatiously as they endeavored to do their work, their proceedings caused considerable interest to more than one passerby; the spectacle of two fashionably attired young men drifting slowly along the pavements ogling all the elderly ladies and never casting a glance at youth and beauty, being as rare in Hammersmith as elsewhere. But though quite conscious themselves of the apparent folly of their conduct they never deviated from their programme. Rupert, indeed, did inwardly promise himself a second visit to this neighborhood, when his character as a man of taste should be redeemed; yet for the present he kept this aspiration in the remotest background of his thoughts, and with admirable fidelity

dwelt on the prosaic features of the portrait almost as steadfastly as his leader.

They paused once for some light refreshments, and even then lunched one at a time, the other keeping vigilant watch outside the confectioner's door, and then sternly resumed their search. And thus the day wore slowly on.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when Rupert, with his eyes fixed upon the back of a female head, was recalling afresh the lineaments of Wilson in preparation for the searching glance he meant to bestow when he overtook her, felt himself seized by the arm. He turned with a start and saw that it was Francis, who had crossed the road, his eyes bright with excitement.

"I think I've got her!" he cried. "Come and look!"

With an elaborately careless air they sauntered across the road.

"Which?" whispered Rupert.

"That one!"

Rupert gazed for a moment, and then with entire conviction he exclaimed:

"That's the woman, Francis!"

"What a bit of luck she was blowing her nose," said Francis devoutly, as her veil descended again and obscured her features.

"The whole thing has been a bit of luck," said Rupert, "an extraordinary bit of luck!"

The lady had evidently been shopping and was now returning home, for she walked briskly without

stopping till she had turned out of the busy thoroughfares into a quiet side street not far from the river. Just as she rounded the corner she looked back for the first time, and it seemed to her pursuers that there was something wary and furtive in her manner, as though she feared she might be tracked even to this remote spot. Fortunately, however, nothing less like emissaries of justice than the dashing-looking pair sauntering arm in arm behind her, could possibly have been imagined, and she continued to walk on rapidly.

"We won't turn down here," said Francis, "let's watch her from the corner."

They strolled across the opening of the side street and then stopped and peered round the corner. They saw her enter a house.

"25!" cried Francis. "It's the 25th house from the top!"

"Right!" said Rupert. "I make it the same."

"And now," added Francis, as they cautiously went down the street, "the first thing is to make inquiries about her."

Once more fortune singularly favored the adventurers. Hardly had he spoken before a postman appeared.

"He's the fellow to ask!" cried Francis. "I'll tackle him while you see if you can secure rooms in the house opposite."

A pleasant manner and half a sovereign will open the hearts of most postmen. In the course of a very few minutes Lord Francis learnt that the lady styled

herself Miss Lingen, that she had taken rooms there on the very day following the flight of Molyneux and Eva Wilson, and that she only received letters from one correspondent. The only disappointing circumstance was the fact that no gentleman was known to have accompanied her or to have visited the house. But then again, this had its encouraging aspect, for it showed that extreme precautions were being taken, and this in turn proved that there must be something of a very dark nature to conceal.

Hardly had he finished his conversation with the postman when Rupert appeared. He also had been successful, but as it turned out his thoroughness had led him a trifle too far.

"I have taken rooms," he announced.

"Taken them?" said Francis. "But, my dear fellow, I only wanted you to inquire! The postman tells me her rooms are at the back of the house. We shan't be able to watch her from the front."

"Dash it!" said Rupert.

Fortunately this slight mishap was easily retrieved. The landlady was compensated for her disappointment; and careful observation showed them that a very similar road ran parallel to this one, with no great distance between the backs of its houses and the back of the house where Miss Lingen lodged.

"That's the place to take rooms!" said Francis.

Like most officers of the British Army he had developed on holiday considerable strategic resource.

Starting from the front of Miss Lingen's house he paced the distance accurately to the top of the street. Then going to the parallel street, he paced the same distance to a yard, and at the door to which this brought him he stopped and rang.

They had rooms to let, but only at the front of the house. This might have damped a less determined man, but Francis was equal to the emergency.

"May I look over the house?" he asked.

They entered and went upstairs. Before a door which clearly must lead into a back room he paused.

"What is this room?" he asked.

"The bathroom, sir."

"We shall take the bathroom!" he announced.

Though his choice seemed singular, the rent he offered was so handsome that the bargain was struck on the spot.

"Now," said he as they closed the bathroom door behind them, "let us watch!"

The window of this apartment was small and placed in an awkward situation, but it is hardly necessary to say that no trifling discomfort prevented both heads from peering steadily out of the window for the next hour. The prospect they overlooked consisted of a strip of back garden in which stood a high poplar still thinly covered with autumnal leaves; beyond lay a row of similar back gardens, and then the back view of a terrace of houses.

Gradually the evening drew in; the sky grew pale, the houses dark, and here and there a light sprang

up in the windows. Suddenly they gave a simultaneous exclamation. A single bright light had appeared directly opposite them, and through the swinging branches of the poplar they knew they were looking at Miss Lingen. Perhaps she thought herself sufficiently screened by the tree; certainly having lit the gas, she never troubled to pull down the blind but moved about her room, now appearing in full view, and now hidden. All the time the dusk thickened till at last it was quite dark outside.

"She's opening the door!" muttered Rupert. "Good Lord, is she going out?"

But Miss Lingen merely took something from some one outside and returned with it to the middle of the room, standing in the brightest of the light.

"It was the post!" exclaimed Francis. "She's opening a letter!"

The swaying and almost bare branches made no veil for Miss Lingen's emotions as she read that letter. Her face showed ever increasing agitation, until at last she threw it down with a gesture of the extremest annoyance and dismay. Then evidently she came to a quick resolution, and the next minute the two watchers could see her hastily putting on her hat.

"It was from him!" cried Francis. "She is going to meet him! No time to be lost, Rupert!"

"Follow her, of course?" whispered Rupert as they ran downstairs.

"Rather!"

They hurried up the street and waited at the corner.

"Here she comes!" said Rupert.

Retiring a few yards they let her pass the end of their road, and then set out in her wake. This time she never troubled to look behind her.

VI

"KEEP close to her here!" whispered Francis.

"Trust me!" answered Rupert, elbowing his way through the thronged Hammersmith Broadway, till he was within a couple of paces of Miss Lingen's back.

Thus they pushed through the vortex of motor-buses and cabs, lights, and people that eddies round the Hammersmith Stations. With the quick decision of a born leader Francis gave his fighting orders to cover all contingencies.

"If she gets on a bus be ready to hail a cab instantly, in case the bus is too full for us. If she goes into the station we'll push ahead of her and book tickets, both by tube and district railway, and then go by whichever she does; for supposing we waited till she's booked, she might just catch a train and we miss it."

"Good business!" muttered Rupert.

She turned into the station.

"Ahead of her now!" commanded Francis.

Each armed with two tickets, they waited for her to take the lead again.

"Tube!" exclaimed Rupert. "I wonder where she's going!"

Miss Lingen took her seat and her pursuers went

into the next carriage. There they each lit a cigarette and breathed more freely.

"In the meantime we have her sitting!" said Francis.

The gates clicked to and the squat little train glittered into the outer darkness. They clattered into Baron's Court and out again, and then with a swelling racket of noises plunged underground. One cannot speak in a tube, and neither felt inclined for shouting, so they sat in silence, glancing now and then down the long car and through the glass doors into the next to see that their quarry was still there. At each station they prepared to rise and rush out, but she never moved till they had got to Leicester Square. Then they sprang up simultaneously. She was getting out.

Through the electric-lit rabbit warren they followed her to the Hampstead Tube, and again they slipped (they trusted) unobserved into the next carriage.

Also, again, they found they had before them a journey of some distance. Miss Lingen never stirred till they ran into Hampstead Heath Station. There at last she alighted.

"The lift will be the rub," said Francis in a guarded voice. "She is almost sure to notice us if we go up by the same lift."

But once more fortune favored them. In addition to the lift ready to start another was down and an attendant stood idly beside it. Francis slipped something into his hand.

"Take us up in this lift now, will you?" he said.

The two lifts reached the top together, but it was only after all the passengers had safely left the first that Francis and Rupert stepped out, and were presently ascending the hill with the dark figure of Miss Lingen still hurrying in front.

"Now!" they muttered.

But they began to find that they were by no means at their journey's end yet. Ever ascending, they found themselves involved in more and more obscure and shady by-ways. They had come, in fact, into Old Hampstead, that strange and picturesque fragment of an ancient country town that still exists within the boundaries of London. Past glimpses of wooden palings, old shuttered houses, and high holly trees, they stealthily followed the hurrying figure. Suddenly as they rounded a corner Francis seized his friend's arm and whispered:

"Rackstraw Road!"

"Good gad!" said Rupert.

A moment later Miss Lingen had vanished through a gate. They hurried up and read the name upon the gate posts.

"Hendon House!" they exclaimed, and looked at one another.

"What the deuce!" said Francis. "Can she be meeting him here?"

"Or going to blackmail old Miss What-ye-may-call-it?" suggested Rupert.

"Well," said Francis in a moment, "we mustn't

lose her whatever she's going to do. Let's follow her."

They passed through the gate and found themselves in a large and exceedingly dark garden. The drive wound among trees, so that in a few paces the last glimmer of the lamps in the road vanished. Not a star was out and a strong gusty wind roared through the tree-tops and every now and then shook down a shower of dead leaves that fell upon their hats or brushed past their faces like little fluttering bats. Then all at once the drive made another bend and they found themselves close under the long dark front of a house, in which chinks of light here and there spoke of comfortable rooms and close-drawn curtains. Suddenly a blaze of light shone in their faces. The front door was open and the figure of Miss Lingen stood outlined in the space.

"Quick, under cover!" whispered Francis, and they sprang back into the trees.

VII

So skilfully had her pursuers executed their movements that their quarry had no suspicion whatever of the peril in her rear. She went up the dark avenue with the assurance of one to whom the ground was quite familiar, and rang the bell with a business-like air. Had it been answered immediately, the subsequent course of events might conceivably have been different, but Mrs. Molyneux had begun by tempting providence, and it would seem that providence had succumbed to the temptation. To-night it decreed that for the better part of five long minutes she should stand in the windy darkness listening to the mournfullest sighs and murmurs among the tree-tops and wondering whether certain sounds, like stealthy footsteps on the drive, were merely items in the gale's programme.

It was also decreed that the delay in the appearance of Miss Richards, the parlormaid, should be caused by her anxiety to finish Chapter XLIV of *The Haunted Baronet.*

When the front door at last was opened, the hand of Miss Richards already trembled a little, and the visitor on the step had time to realize acutely certain embarrassing possibilities.

For a few seconds she said nothing at all, and

then stepping forward with a furtive air she raised her veil and said in a low voice:

"Richards."

The pallid Richards uttered but one blood-curdling shriek and then fled screaming through the hall.

"Richards!" cried the lady, following her eagerly. "Richards—it's only me—Mrs. Molyneux."

But Richards knew only too well who it was, and this assurance merely increased her terror. She pawed the drawing-room door, convulsively seeking for the handle, and filling the house with clamor. The door opened and revealed the austere Eugenia, and simultaneously two more maids appeared from the backward parts.

"What on earth is the matt——" began Eugenia, and then her tongue clave to her mouth. She, too, had seen the apparition.

"Oh, oh!" screamed the distracted Richards. "Mrs. Molyneux's ghost! All bloody—all bloody! 'Elp! 'elp! All bloody!"

Three screams answered her. The two maids vanished even more swiftly than they had appeared, and, to judge from the sounds, communicated their terrors first to all the metallic implements in the kitchen, and finally to their bedroom door. Eugenia, borne backwards by Richards' impetuous rush, had yet presence of mind to slam and lock the drawing-room door between her and the advancing wraith, and even shoot the bolt.

Meantime Richards continued her career, stopping

only at the speaking trumpet of her astonished mistress.

"All what?" repeated Miss Macpherson. "Speak distinctly, Richards, and do not breathe like that! All bloody? What is? Not the dining-room carpet, I trust? Mrs.—what did you say?—Molyneux!"

"Her ghost—her ghost!" cried Richards. "It's in the hall—in the hall at this very moment! I saw it plain as I see you, mum! 'Ollow eyes it 'ad, mum, and blood was dripping from 'er fingers, and sulphur you could smell like scent."

Had Miss Macpherson also read *The Haunted Baronet* she would doubtless have been struck with the remarkable similarity between the ghost of her niece and the spirit that troubled Sir Peregrine. As it was, she could only accept these features as the description of an unbiassed eye witness, and her quavering cries swelled the concert of terror.

Meanwhile the unhappy apparition seemed to be endeavoring by its mundane conduct and common-sense demeanor to throw doubts upon its own spiritual origin. First it listened at the key-hole of the drawing-room door. Then in a firm, distinct voice it said:

"I am not dead!"

Again it listened, but only heard a sound as of confused wailing. Thereupon it adopted a course which it possibly forgot was proverbially common to ghosts as well as to humans. It knocked thrice upon the panels and then began:

"Aunt Margaret, please be sensible——"

But the knocking had merely renewed the noises' activity. From wails they again became shrieks. The apparition gave them a minute or two to subside, and then with a note of distinct irritation said very loudly and slowly:

"Eugenia! Richards! Do not be a pair of idiots! I am no more a ghost than you are!"

The door was exceedingly substantial, and the clinging group within had never ceased to moan through this appeal, so that a trifling misunderstanding was excusable enough.

"It *says* it's a ghost!" shrieked Richards. "I 'eard it! I 'eard it! Oh, oh! All bloody!"

The apparition drew back from the door with a gesture of despair. At first its intentions seemed to be to wait for a little longer, but as it stood there alone, with the wind from the open door making the gas jets flicker, and the wails within mingling with the sighs of the trees without, it seemed (if the expression may be used of a member of the spiritual world) to lose nerve. It hesitated, it wavered, and at last it suddenly started and hurried out of the house; summarizing its conclusion regarding the world of flesh it had just visited in the words:

"Those silly women!"

Down the dark avenue Miss Lingen hurried. She had shut the front door behind her, and now no sound was heard but the wind in the swinging boughs. She reached the gate, and suddenly another noise was

audible. But it was not a noise of wailing; it was again that sound as of stealthy footsteps on the drive. She stopped by the gate and listened. Undoubtedly they were footsteps.

"Have they recovered their senses and come after me?" she thought; and waited peering into the blackness. Then close upon her two forms emerged. They were a pair of young men coming at a run. At the sight of her standing there they too stopped, and she could hear their voices hurriedly consulting.

"Hang it, let's try the other idea!" said one. "She may give us the slip if we don't!"

"Good business!" said the other.

They advanced upon her; one coming to either shoulder, and she did not know whether to feel more relieved to see that they were apparently gentlemen or alarmed at their menacing air.

In a stern voice the taller of them said:

"Eva Wilson!"

VIII

THE lady looked at her captors with a mixture of alarm and bewilderment.

"Who are you?" she demanded in a creditably steady voice.

"It is enough for you if I describe myself as a private detective," replied the young man.

"And what do you want with me?" she asked.

"I arrest you in the—er——"

"King's name, old chap," whispered the other.

"In the King's name for being concerned in the murder of Mrs. Molyneux."

The lady started; the rapidity of her translation from Mrs. Molyneux's ghost to her murderer possibly affecting her nerves. They perceived the start and exchanged significant glances. Clearly it was what they had expected. They seemed surprised, however, by her answer.

"Rubbish!" she replied.

"You won't say rubbish when you're in the dock, old girl," retorted Rupert.

This familiar address seemed to make her suddenly realize her position in the eyes of the law as represented by these enterprising minions.

"You actually think that my name is Eva Wilson?" she demanded.

"I don't think; I am sure," said Lord Francis.

"On what grounds do you hold this ridiculous belief?"

He took a newspaper cutting out of his pocket-book and they moved outside the gate so that the rays of a lamp in the road could just reach them.

"Perhaps you fail to recognize your own portrait," said he.

Again she started a little, and they could just hear her murmur:

"I see!"

It was clear from the expression of her undeniably intelligent face that she was considering the matter. Then she evidently made up her mind.

"Well," she said, "supposing I am Eva Wilson. What then?"

Lord Francis looked at her sternly.

"Where is your paramour?" he demanded.

"My what!" she exclaimed.

"Paramour," he repeated. "The man Molyneux! Where is your lover?"

For a creature so abandoned she seemed unusually sensitive.

"I must request you not to use such disgusting language!" she retorted.

The young men looked at one another and laughed.

"Go it, ducky!" said Rupert genially.

"Come, come!" said Francis, "you can't impose on us like that. Where is Molyneux?"

"I should be obliged if you would kindly refer

to him as Mr. Molyneux," said she with some asperity.

"Well, I'm d—d!" exclaimed Rupert.

For a moment Francis stared at her, his expression increasing in severity.

"Look here," he said at length, "I may tell you that I consider this humor in exceedingly bad taste, and that you won't improve your position by it. You are in a tight enough place now, and you'll be in a tighter if you don't answer my questions."

This fact seemed to be dawning on her also. Her attitude underwent a decided change. Looking at them closely in turn she said:

"Surely you are not professional policemen?"

"No," said Francis candidly, "we are not."

Again she reflected.

"Supposing I told you where Mr. Molyneux was, what would you do?" she demanded.

Francis was a soldier, not a diplomatist.

"I am bound to answer," he replied gravely, "that I should take immediate steps to end his career of treachery and crime."

She seemed considerably startled.

"And do you expect me to tell you where he is?"

Francis laid his hand not unkindly upon her shoulder.

"My poor woman," he said, "I honestly believe you to be more sinned against than sinning. That monster has wrecked your life, as he has foully terminated another's. It is merely a question of time before he falls either into my hands or those of the

police, and it can hardly matter to you whether I put an end to him or the hangman. But the police will put you in the dock along with him, while I shall give you an opportunity of repentance and reformation. I have no quarrel with you, my poor creature. Come now, tell us!"

Her emotions during this appeal seemed to be mixed, but at its conclusion she answered with no ambiguity:

"I shall tell you absolutely nothing!"

"Very well," said he.

The two turned aside and consulted in whispers. Then Francis again addressed her.

"In that case you must come with us," he said.

"Where?" she asked.

"To wherever I choose to take you. Your liberty of course will be restricted, but you will be quite safe."

"And if I decline?"

"In that case we must hand you over to the police."

She looked at them and then up and down the quiet road. Just at that moment a ray of light played for an instant upon the front of a house a short way off. It came from the bull's eye lantern of a constable. Her first impulse was to shout for his assistance. And then, as she had never done before, she acutely realized her position. All would be at an end if she called him in. The other alternative was unpleasant, but she was a woman of rare determination.

"I suppose I shall have to accompany you," she said.

Behind her back her captors whispered again.

"We'll get it out of her sooner or later!" said Francis.

"No fears!" said Rupert.

PART III

THE BODY

I

"*Dear Buffington,*

"While not doubting for a moment that you are doing your best to solve the Hyacinth Road mystery, I must point out that nearly a week has now elapsed since the murder was committed, and that none of your promised startling developments have yet taken place. We cannot keep our public satisfied with padding much longer. Interest will wane, and there is no crime ready at present to take its place. Can't you find *something?* The body cannot have vanished. Have you tried the coal-cellar as well as the wine-cellar? Trusting that by to-morrow at latest you will provide some *facts* and not mere theories, yours,

"A. J. CADBURY."

Buffington flung this letter down on the table indignantly. "This is the way a scientific reasoner is treated!" he exclaimed. "This is the thanks I get for lifting the floors of every room in the basement. Try the coal-cellar! I *began* with it! Cadbury hasn't even read my articles!"

Felix Chapel murmured sympathetically as the outraged investigator paced the library floor. It is doing Buffington bare justice to admit that this reminder was a little uncalled for. He and Felix had

been living together in the house ever since the evening they first met, and in the opinion of his fellow journalist, Buffington had erred, if anything, on the thorough side. The late Mr. Molyneux had spent, in fact, many dismal hours contemplating the excavations in his basement. He was beginning to wonder how much of his literary profits would be left by the time he had restored his house to a habitable condition.

"That is what troubles me!" he would say to himself not infrequently.

Had he but known what a trifle these troubles would seem in a few days' time! But fate seldom warns her destined victims.

Indignant with his ungrateful editor though he felt, Buffington realized the unpalatable element of truth in his letter. He—Buffington—had been engaged for nearly a week upon what he had described (in large type) as "The Crime of the Century," and he had discovered not a vestige of the corpse; not a single clue to the discovery of the criminal.

"Balked!" he muttered bitterly. "Buffington diddled!"

He lit a pipe, fell into a chair with his head between his hands and thought desperately.

A full hour slipped by while he wrestled with the situation. Felix watching him began to feel a little uncomfortable. He was the kindliest of scholars, and such a terrible mental strain he felt might permanently injure the young man.

"Oughtn't you to have a turn in the garden?" he suggested.

Buffington leapt to his feet with a cry of triumph.

"The last link in the chain!" he said. "Chapel, I have found it!"

"Found what?"

"The body!"

"Found it?" gasped Felix. "Where?"

"I know where it is! You have given me the clue. Chapel, listen to this train of reasoning!" He drew his chair close to Chapel's, and began impressively, "Carry your mind back to the day of the drama. At 7.45 on Tuesday evening the Bishop of Bedford arrived at this house. By that time Mrs. Molyneux had disappeared. At 3.30 that same day she was seen to enter the house alive and apparently well. Therefore she was murdered and buried between those hours. That gives her husband four hours to accomplish his terrible and ghastly task."

"Mightn't he have done the burying at night?" suggested Felix.

"That supposition has been proved untenable," said Buffington briefly, and continued his ardent argument. "The time at his disposal for her interment was further curtailed by the fact that it wouldn't be dark enough till nearly six o'clock; and after the operation he had to dress for dinner. With only an hour at his disposal where does a man bury a corpse? That is the point I had reached when you uttered the word 'garden.' Of course it will be in the garden! And what part of the garden? *The softest*

place! And what is the softest place? The flower beds!"

He rose and started for the door.

"Where are you going?"

"To dig."

"In my—I mean in the flower beds?"

"Naturally."

"But they are full of bulbs!"

Buffington laughed.

"Really, my dear Chapel! Do you imagine that one can find bodies without breaking bulbs?"

The next hour was one of the most uncomfortable that Felix Chapel had ever spent. From his library window he commanded a perfect view of the operations, and though at brief intervals he tore himself away and endeavored to drown his anguish in literary composition, he was drawn back each time by the dreadful fascination of the sight. Stripped of coat, waistcoat, and hat, Buffington fell upon the flower bed with almost maniacal ardor. Up would fly the earth in spadefuls; bulbs, perennials, and cuttings shooting heavenwards like fishes when a mine explodes, and descending in all directions over path and turf. Then would come a few minutes of quiet recuperation during which the panting investigator wiped his brow, blew his nose, and peered into the cavity he had made. But though designed by nature rather for the part of thinker than athlete, Buffington's strenuous spirit never suffered him to pause for long. As if set in motion by an electrical discharge, he would suddenly drop his colored handkerchief

upon the path, drive his spade violently into the soil, stamp it with his foot, and up would fly another shower of botanical specimens.

Felix Chapel could stand it no longer. He descended to the garden.

"Pardon me," he said hurriedly, "but really I can't help thinking that if anything was concealed in this flower bed you would have found it by now."

Buffington paused only for an instant.

"Every bed in this garden shall be searched to the bottom!" he said. "And if I find nothing in them, up comes the turf! The body *must* be here!"

He fell to work again relentlessly, and Felix Chapel returned miserably to the house.

"He must find *something*," he muttered, "or I shall not have a square inch of garden left!"

He racked his brains; he drew down the library blinds that he might think in peace; he tried to imagine what Buffington would take most pleasure in discovering, and at last he cried:

"Yes, that's it! I must get some at all costs."

Two minutes later he had left the house.

II

Mr. William Noggett had for over twenty years conducted a respectable butcher's business at 215 Bingham Street, Islington, without any very unusual or remarkable incident befalling him; but that morning he was given what he afterwards described as "a turn."

"My attention was first directed to the gent," he informed the crowd which had assembled out of the void five minutes later, "by a lydy wot come in for 'er usual of tripe. 'Angin' about on the hother side of the road, 'e were, a-starin' at my winders in a most peculiar manner.

"'Balmy,' says I.

"'Boozed,' says she.

"But" (and here Mr. Noggett lowered his voice impressively), "he were worse, he were mad!"

What the gent actually did was to cross the road at last with the air of a man who has come to a sudden and desperate resolution, hurry into Mr. Noggett's shop, and begin breathlessly:

"Mr. Noggett, I presume? A very fine day, is it not?" (A drizzling rain had been falling for half an hour.) "A most extraordinary and curious circumstance has just befallen me, Mr. Noggett. A lady of great wealth, from whom I have ultimate

expectations, has conceived a violent passion for discovering bones buried in her garden. Her idea is, I believe, that they increase the fertility of the soil. Possibly this seems a strange whim?"

The gentleman paused as though he wished to test the acceptability of his narrative before proceeding any further. Mr. Noggett declared subsequently that he already began to have his suspicions, but he answered calmly enough:

"I've often 'eard o' bone dust bein' used as a kind o' manure."

"Ah, but the strange thing is that mere dust will not satisfy this lady's requirements in the least. They must be large bones; very large bones indeed; really preposterously large for so small a garden. She imagines that they give her tulips an unusual radiance. Do you possess any such bones, Mr. Noggett?"

The gentleman made this request in a low, agitated voice, at the same time stretching forth his hand towards the startled butcher. It actually contained a sovereign, but Mr. Noggett did not wait to discover this.

"'Elp! 'Elp!" he cried in a piercing voice, whilst the "lydy" in a paroxysm of terror, grasped a pound of sausages so passionately that she subsequently forgot to relinquish them. They had one fleeting glimpse of the gentleman running swiftly down the street, and then the episode passed into the realm of history.

"Wot a' escape you 'ad, Mr. Noggett!" said

the lydy, retiring with the sausages convulsively pressed beneath her shawl.

At No. 76 Amsterdam Road, Hackney, flourished the emporium of Mr. Henry Hogseed, butcher, the second of his profession to experience "a turn" that day. His adventure was not quite so alarming as Mr. Noggett's, but it gave him food for reflection during many subsequent weeks. About two hours after the extraordinary affair at Islington a strange gentleman likewise appeared in Amsterdam Road, Hackney, and made a prolonged study of Mr. Hogseed's shop. All the time his lips moved rapidly, and from the account of several small boys who stood in his immediate vicinity for some minutes and studied him with extreme attention, it would seem as if he were trying to commit a speech to memory. At length he crossed the street and entered Mr. Hogseed's establishment. Though he was evidently extremely nervous, he spoke with great fluency, and with a refinement of voice and manner rare in Hackney. In fact he might almost have been a curate, according to Mr. Hogseed, were it not that his costume and appearance rather suggested to his mind a cross between an actor and a piano tuner.

"I have been exceedingly unwell for some months, Mr. Hogseed," he began, "and acting on the advice of a friend of mine who holds a tutorial position in the University of Oxford, I went to consult an American specialist lately established in New Bond Street. This eminent physician holds the most modern ideas

with regard to diet, and what do you imagine, Mr. Hogseed, is the only form of nutrition of which I have partaken for nearly ten days past?"

He looked inquiringly, and it almost seemed apprehensively, at the butcher, who, being a man of limited sympathy, merely suggested:

"Gas."

The stranger shrank back, evidently wounded by his bluntness, but with a great effort summoned up his courage and replied (though in a decidedly tremulous voice):

"No, Mr. Hogseed, not gas exactly. In fact, quite the opposite."

"'Lectricity?" suggested the butcher.

The gentleman laughed nervously.

"Quite happy, Mr. Hogseed, very happy indeed. I congratulate you on the possession of a very nice sense of humor." (At this Mr. Hogseed began to finger his knife, and the gentleman's voice grew increasingly tremulous.) "No, Mr. Hogseed, this specialist has ordered me to confine myself to a diet of bones; that, in fact, is why I have come to you. They must be large bones—as large as a man's—or anyhow as a woman's—and I want about seventy-three of them. This may seem a great many, Mr. Hogseed, but when I tell you that I am ordered to boil them down——"

"And lay 'em on a thruppenny bit?" inquired Mr. Hogseed.

"Well—er—something of that kind——"

The knife flourished round Mr. Hogseed's head.

"You think ye're funny, do you?" he roared. "Get out o' my shop, or I'll——"

But the gentleman had not waited to learn the alternative. He was gone.

Unquestionably fate had designs on the butchering trade that day. An hour and a half later the same strange gentleman was observed perambulating the Mile End Road; pacing backwards and forwards opposite the shop of Mr. Isaac Engelbach.

According to the evidence of a constable subsequently consulted in the matter, he had been seen to stop opposite the London Hospital a few minutes previously with an air of sudden inspiration, and thereafter his lips moved as though in the act of composition, much as they had done before.

He entered Mr. Engelbach's shop more nervously than ever, but finding that this time he was received with almost servile politeness, his confidence gradually increased.

"Mr. Engelbach," he began, "I find myself in a very awkward position. Really very awkward indeed, Mr. Engelbach. I am a practising surgeon in Harley Street and I have had the grave misfortune to lose my skeleton."

The earnest glance which accompanied this statement caused Mr. Engelbach visible uneasiness.

"I have not got him, I thwear it!" he declared.

"My dear Mr. Engelbach," said the gentleman reassuringly, and at the same time with considerably more assurance himself, "I do not suggest such a

thing for a moment, but you must see how such a misfortune handicaps me in my profession, and I should take it as a great favor if you would be good enough to supply me with the material for another."

"For a thkeleton?"

"You have bones?"

"Oh, yeth, plenty of bones."

"I want about seventy-three; in fact just enough to make a complete lady."

"A lady? But they are cowth and sheepth!"

The gentleman seemed a little taken aback.

"I had not thought of that!" he murmured, and then aloud he inquired, "Are they very different?"

Mr. Engelbach scratched his head.

"I ain't 'ad a education in anatermy," he replied thoughtfully, "but generally thpeaking I should thay some boneths was something thimilar, and some wathn't."

The gentleman in turn reflected.

"After all perhaps a complete skeleton is unnecessary," he said confidentially. "I should be greatly obliged, Mr. Engelbach, if you would be so kind as to supply me with say a couple of dozen bones of a so to speak neutral character, bones which if examined by an enthusiastic and comparatively uneducated amateur might reasonably be mistaken for relics of a middle-aged lady. Can you do this for me? I will pay anything you consider reasonable."

Mr. Engelbach cheered up greatly.

"I can give you two dozen beautieth for—ten bob?"

"Of various sizes?"

"Assorted boneth," Mr. Engelbach assured him.

A few minutes later a strange gentleman leapt onto a motor bus closely clasping a small sack, and vanished from the Mile End Road. Though he has often looked out for him, and ever since that day keeps in stock a large assortment of neutral bones with a view to cementing his Harley Street connection, Mr. Engelbach has never again seen either him or any of his professional friends.

III

Out in the narrow road between the high walls and closed doors of the secretive little villas, the populace of London was reassembling. A posse of constables again guarded the green door of No. 47. With horrified voices and fascinated eyes the crowd discussed the Molyneux drama and gazed upon the ill-omened house. Clearly some strange and startling developments had rekindled the horror of humanity.

Within the house the shadows thickened in each deserted room and silent passage. To the front the blinds were drawn down and there was no sign of life. But if it had been possible to view the back, one blind would have been seen to be up and one figure moving within. To and fro across the library floor paced the unhappy spirit of Irwin Molyneux encased within the semblance of Felix Chapel.

"I meant it all for the best," he repeated to himself, "but have I erred? Have I rather overdone it?"

Then he would pause and glance with deep distaste at a copy of the *Evening Tribune*, and his eyes for the twentieth time would meet this shocking announcement:

"MOLYNEUX MYSTERY. GRUESOME DISCOVERY. DISMEMBERED BODY FOUND."

"Dismembered" seemed to affect him unpleasantly.

"I had not realized they would draw such a very distressing conclusion," he murmured.

Unwillingly his eyes followed the column downwards, proceeding as it were by a series of jerks from headline to headline. Seen thus the salient features seemed to be: "Pathetic Pile of Bones—Hacked Her into Fragments—The Remainder of the Body—Probably Removed in Suitcase—Worse than a Gorilla."

Thus summarized, the exploits of Irwin Molyneux did not appear to afford him great satisfaction. In vain he endeavored to console himself by looking out of the window and repeating:

"But I have saved my bulbs!"

Another glance at the paper made this compensation shrink to comparatively small dimensions. In a moment of extreme despair he even cried:

"This may end in my having to resign my membership of the Athenæum!"

When one has touched the depths of despair a reaction is inevitable. Mr. Molyneux lit a cigarette, and being an infrequent smoker, the soothing effect was so marked that in a little he was able to regard the headlines with an approach to philosophy.

"After all, the Committee may take a lenient, even a humorous view of the matter," he reflected, "and in any case if I hadn't buried them I shouldn't have had a daffodil next spring!"

His dark thoughts were further distracted by

watching for a few minutes a very interesting performance. The fortunate Buffington appeared beneath the window, accompanied by a cinematograph apparatus and a competent staff of operators. The remains of Mrs. Molyneux were replaced, the expert threw off his coat and grasped his spade, and in the brief space of five minutes successfully dug them up again. The party then dispersed and the radiant excavator (whose most cherished ambition had long been to appear on the screen of an Electric Theatre) paid a brief visit to his colleague.

In addition to renewing his congratulations Felix ventured to add a gentle word of protest.

"Don't you think," he suggested, "that 'dismembered' is *rather* a strong expression?"

"The strongest I could find," said Buffington complacently, "and the extraordinary thing is that it actually fits the facts! One seldom has such a bit of luck in journalism."

The cultured essayist sighed.

"And now for Molyneux!" continued the expert.

"You—you still hope to find him, do you?" inquired Felix with a slight note of anxiety.

"My dear chap, it's a mere matter of days. I only hope I won't find him in the same state."

"The—er—same state?"

"Pulled to pieces by the mob," explained Buffington lightly, yet evidently a trifle concerned lest, after all his trouble, he should secure an imperfect murderer. "If they catch him there won't be much of him left for us!"

"But—er—without any trial—or explanation?"

"If they spot him he's a deader before he has time to explain. A dozen policemen might keep him out of their hands, but no fewer."

"How—how many policemen are watching the house at present?" asked Felix hurriedly.

"Three or four."

"But—but—couldn't we get, say eight or nine more?"

Buffington seemed surprised.

"What on earth for?" he asked.

"Oh, ah," said Felix, "—nothing."

His voice almost died away; and once again the retentive memory of Buffington noted the slight circumstance, incomprehensible though it seemed at the moment.

A minute or two later the crowd in the road enjoyed a fresh sensation; the spectacle of the famous Buffington appearing through the green door and disappearing into a taxi-cab. But even more thrilling would have been its sensations had it noticed in an upper window, one corner of the blind being cautiously lifted, and known whose eyes were gazing at it.

Up in that room a dismal and nervous man was lurking.

"The mob!" he murmured. "The insensate mob!"

It had now begun to rain, and as he gazed upon the shining umbrellas and glistening hats that filled Hyacinth Road as far as one could see, he found a

little difficulty in accepting the assurances of his calmer reason.

"At any moment you can produce her; you can explain; they may feel a trifle sold, but it will be all right; there is no danger," said his reason.

"How fierce they look!" replied his nerves. "I overdid it; yes, I overdid it!"

IV

"It's dogged as does it," Inspector Bray used to say, adding by way of summing up the secret of his success accurately as well as epigrammatically, "dogged *and* brains."

He might be less in the public eye than Buffington, and he took no stock in what he termed "fancy theories" but none who knew anything about the inner history of the great crimes of the past fifteen years doubted that Bray would have his man sooner or later. They only marvelled that Molyneux had managed to evade him for so long.

It speaks volumes for the natural abilities of Lord Francis Phillimore that he had hit upon the very same line of research. Bray also was looking for Eva Wilson, though with the advantage of having an entirely different portrait of her in his pocket. It was the likeness of a young and exceedingly attractive girl, accompanied by very tolerably accurate letter-press and the promise of a handsome reward that he distributed about the town.

Over one of these handbills Mr. Morris and Mr. Jephson were holding an earnest consultation one afternoon. They were a sleek, distinguished looking pair of gentlemen, attired in long frock coats, who appeared to spend their day in saying, "This way, Madam," with the polish of a Chesterfield as each

lady of fashion entered the Emporium, and then gazing in a monumental position through the glass doors out into the throng of Regent Street.

"It's her!" said Mr. Morris.

"The very girl!" said Mr. Jephson.

"What is the reward?" whispered Mr. Morris.

"Two hundred pounds!" whispered Mr. Jephson.

No one had ever marked on their patrician faces a trace of emotion before; so that it was not surprising that a girl standing behind a counter a little distance off should notice their excitement. What seemed remarkable was that they should keep furtively glancing at her, and that each time they did so she should have her face as little visible as she could contrive.

Unfortunately there is no virtue, however elegant, but has its compensating drawback. Mr. Morris and Mr. Jephson were such perfect gentlemen that they made indifferent detectives. Long before they had fully made up their minds about the portrait and what steps they should next take, the girl had understood the situation exactly. It almost seemed indeed that she had been prepared for it. For when at length they approached her counter she was gone.

"Where is Miss Woolcombe?" demanded Mr. Morris in a kingly voice.

"Do not mention who it is that desires to see her; merely request her to step this way," added Mr. Jephson with equal dignity.

Five minutes passed; then ten; and then a quarter

of an hour; and still there was no sign of Miss Woolcombe. And then an even stronger emotion perturbed the stately gentlemen. Miss Woolcombe had left the shop and vanished into space.

"It *was* her!" they exclaimed in chorus.

Several ladies that afternoon were struck with a mournful note they had never before associated with the words "This way, Madam."

In the dusk of that same afternoon, about the hour when lamps are lit, a girl alighted from an omnibus upon the comparatively sylvan pavement of Maida Vale, and turned up St. John's Wood Road. She was slim; she was becomingly and very quietly dressed; she carried herself charmingly; there was every promise of a pretty face, but strangely enough it was hidden by an exceedingly heavy veil; a veil so heavy that one had to take her beauty on trust. It was raining hard and she walked quickly, her umbrella up, her eyes downcast. Evidently she had been in that region before, for without any hesitation she made her way straight for Hyacinth Road. By this time the heavy downpour had thinned out the crowd of spectators till only the keenest enthusiasts were left; stern spirits who throve on horrors as their weaker brothers thrive on stout. Yet even this gathering seemed to disconcert the girl. She stopped and hesitated for some seconds, and then coming to a decision, walked firmly up to the very door of No. 47 itself. Though all the thrilled enthusiasts saw was her passage through the door by those ordinary mechanical means of locomotion used

by their own sisters, they felt they had not waited in vain.

Meanwhile the girl had been shown into the library. Felix Chapel rose with a nervous start as the door opened, but perceiving her sex recovered his composure. Thinking it probable that she was merely an emissary of the Women's Franchise League anxious to persuade him to draw a moral from the lamentable fate of Mrs. Molyneux ("with a vote it could not possibly have happened," he had been assured by several lady correspondents), he politely offered her a chair. He grew decidedly more uncomfortable when she remained standing, her eyes (through her heavy veil) fixed on him intently.

"What can I do for you?" he inquired with the very slightest tremor.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "It is your voice! You are so well disguised I feared I had made a mistake."

Felix steadied himself against the mantelpiece.

"Who are you?" he cried.

For answer she threw up her veil.

"Eva Wilson!" he murmured in a low voice, as though he feared the walls might overhear him.

"Mr. Molyneux!" she said, speaking quickly and earnestly. "Tell me what all this means! Where is Mrs. Molyneux? Why do you pretend she has disappeared? Why do you make this mystery? It seems like a nightmare!"

"It is like a nightmare," agreed Mr. Molyneux in a melancholy voice.

"But why do you let it go on? Why did you begin it?"

"I suppose," he said with a sigh, "that I shall have to explain."

"Indeed I think you ought to!"

Thereupon he explained.

"Well," she cried when he had finished, "this may be all very well for you, but it is very hard lines on me! No sooner had I got a new situation than I had to fly because I was recognized as the woman Wilson! I assure you, *I* am thoroughly tired of being a notorious criminal. Indeed, Mr. Molyneux, I am very sorry to interfere with your plans, but things simply can't go on like this."

"My dear girl," he answered heartily, "I most thoroughly agree with you. I too by this time have enjoyed sufficient notoriety to last me for the rest of my life—and more than sufficient excitement, but —er—what can we do? My wife entered into the scheme with such enthusiasm, and her determination is under ordinary circumstances such an admirable feature of her character. To resume prematurely her position among the living would disappoint her exceedingly——"

"Where is she?" interrupted Eva.

"Between ourselves," he said confidentially, "she is living in retirement in the neighborhood of Hammersmith."

"Give me her address and I'll go and see her at once!"

"Will you?" he cried, sitting down to his desk with the alacrity of a man for whom life was beginning to recover its savor. "That is a capital idea! I give you full permission to add my entreaties to your own. Please remind her also that she has not written to me for several days past, and say I have been awaiting the news of a certain—er—commission she was going to perform, with some impatience." He handed her a slip of paper. "This is her address, and Miss Lingen is the name to which she temporarily answers."

"I shall tell her," said the girl firmly, "that if she won't confess the truth I shall go to the police myself!"

He looked after her with admiration.

"How enviable," he reflected, "to know one's mind so clearly! It seems to assist one to perceive what is the right thing to do even better than a university education! Why didn't I think of seeing Harriet myself? However, all is well that ends well."

A couple of hours later he was seated over the library fire, enjoying with a sense of renewed relish a scholarly work by his friend Mr. Harbottle Smith on *Neolithic Assyria* when, somewhat to his surprise, the same veiled figure was again shown in.

"Well," he smiled, "what news have you brought back?"

"Mr. Molyneux," she cried in a strange voice, "she has gone!"

"Gone?" he repeated vaguely.

"For the last three days they have seen or heard absolutely nothing of Miss Lingen!"

He leapt to his feet.

"Gone!" he cried wildly.

V

"I SHALL be hanged!" cried Mr. Molyneux disconsolately. "I shall be hanged!"

"Oh, no!" said Eva. "She will come back before then. You won't be hung!"

For an instant the scholar triumphed over the man.

"'Hanged' is the correct past participle," he replied, and then humanity again prevailing he cried, "I have actually provided them with her remains—provided them myself! What damning evidence! What an egregious fool! And you, my poor girl—I fear you will be hanged with me!"

"I?" said Eva. "Oh, no, they don't hang women!"

"In a case like this," said Mr. Molyneux mournfully, "they will hang everybody they can lay their hands on. Public feeling is so inflamed—the case has acquired so much notoriety—yes, if we escape being torn in pieces by the mob, it will only be to expiate my folly on the gallows!"

Though decidedly affected by the acuteness of his alarm Eva retained her composure admirably.

"Please, Mr. Molyneux," she expostulated, "don't give way to despair already. Nobody has suspected who you are so far, and why should they now?"

"I cannot deceive them forever," he replied dismally.

"Well, keep on deceiving them as long as you can. As for me——"

"Yes, my poor girl, as for you!" he interrupted. "I have ruined your life—I have blasted——"

"Hush!" she said, "don't talk so loud, and don't worry about me. I shall look after myself somehow. But what I must do at once is to get away from here. We certainly mustn't be caught *together.*"

He grew even paler.

"True," he cried, "true! Good-bye! Good-bye!"

"One moment!" she said, resisting his well-meant effort to assist her to the door. "There is a man on duty in the house, isn't there?"

"Yes," he stammered, "yes—so there is!"

"Anybody else?"

"Only a cook who comes in for the day. But she will be away by now."

"Then if you make an excuse and send the man out for a few minutes I'll slip out when he's gone. He looked at me rather curiously when I came back here, and he had better not see me again."

"Excellent!" he exclaimed, and then his face again fell. "But the mob in the road?"

"It's pouring so hard, they've all gone. There was no one in the road when I came in."

"How capable you are!" he murmured. "Yes, yes, excellently planned, but—er—what excuse shall I make for sending the man out?"

"Oh, anything!" she cried impatiently. "Cigarettes!"

"Cigarettes?" said he, moving towards the door and repeating the word as he went. "Cigarettes—cigarettes—yes, I shall remember—cigarettes."

In a few minutes he returned with an air of extreme excitement.

"He has actually gone!" he cried in a hoarse whisper. "I said 'cigarettes' and he went! Come quickly! Fly!"

With the best intentions in the world, the unfortunate gentleman was a trifle precipitate. Not content with the speed which she made through the door, he gave her a push, and fate, as if waiting to chastise him, seized the chance.

The floor of the hall was polished; before the door lay a small mat; Eva's foot was on the mat just as he pushed. The next instant the mat had shot across the slippery floor and Eva descended with a sickening thud.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" cried the luckless essayist.

For answer the poor girl returned a moan. He gasped.

"What's happened!" he cried.

She did not answer for a moment. Then in a shaken voice she murmured:

"I have sprained my ankle."

For a few moments neither spoke. The pain kept her silent; the realization of the awful consequences paralyzed him. Then simultaneously they moved.

She tried to rise, and he lifted her shoulders. Leaning against the wall, she tried to put the injured foot to the ground, and a spasm of pain passed over her face again.

"Mr. Molyneux," she said, "I'm very sorry, but I can't possibly go away like this. I'm afraid I can't even walk as far as the gate."

"Then—then——" he stammered, "we shall be caught together! And Harriet has vanished! Can't you—can't you possibly do *something?*"

She thought quickly.

"If I got upstairs—would I be safe?"

"Safe? Good Heavens, Buffington is living here too! He'll probably be back to-night—certainly to-morrow!"

"Then you must put me in the attic!" she said. "Quick! Give me your arm!"

He got her upstairs and they stopped beneath the trapdoor leading to the attic.

"Now," she said, "run and fetch the steps!"

He rushed.

"Hold the steps," she said, "I'll pull myself up."

With his eyes decorously downcast, he clutched the steps till he felt them relieved of her weight. When at last he looked shyly up he saw her face palely in the blackness above.

"Take the steps away!" she said, "and don't bring them back——"

"I shan't!" he cried. "I'll take them to the coal cellar—I'll break them up with a hatchet—I'll leave no trace——"

"Wait!" she commanded. "I was going to say don't bring them back till it's quite safe. *Then* I should like a few blankets, and a candle, and something to eat occasionally."

"Occasionally?" he gasped. "Do you mean to say you are going to stay there—*long?*"

"I must till I can walk!"

"My God!" he muttered.

"I'll need some water too——"

Mr. Molyneux rose to the occasion this time.

"The cistern!" he cried. "The cistern stays up there! You may drink as much of it as you like——"

"Listen!" she interrupted. "Isn't that some one at the front door? If it's that man come back, tell him I went away while he was out!"

The trapdoor closed. He thrust the steps into his bedroom; and then for a few seconds he stood there listening to the opening and shutting of the front door.

VI

"HULLO!" said Buffington.

Felix Chapel peered over the banisters.

"Oh," said he, "it—tit—tit—tit—it's you, is it?"

"You've caught a chill, old man," pronounced Buffington. "What have you been doing?"

"Only—only—folding up some clothes."

"I always said you were a rum bird," said Buffington candidly. "Come down and have a drink and see my latest."

Mr. Molyneux's invariable nightcap had been a glass of warmed but otherwise virginal water. Whiskey at that hour disagreed both with him and his present incarnation, but if at that moment he had been invited to drink vodka with his dreaded colleague he would have complied. Unhappily sipping his glass he glanced at Buffington's latest:

"HORROR ON HORROR'S HEAD," he read, "LITERALLY DEVILISH—BRUTE BEASTS HAVE MORE HUMANITY."

His eyes declined to take in more, and all the time like a steam hammer his heart thumped out the refrain, "He must go! He must go!"

He gulped down half of his drink at a draught and smiled a ghastly smile.

"Splendid!" he said. "Splendid! And now—er—what next?"

"Molyneux next!"

"You—you want to catch him? Yes, yes, of course! Well now—I—er—have thought of a splendid idea."

"I am generally able to provide my own ideas," said the expert somewhat coldly, "but what is yours?"

"You expect him to come back to this house, don't you?"

"I am certain he will come back."

"Well now, wouldn't it be a good plan if you went away—do you see?—went away."

"Why?"

"Because he may not venture if he knows you're here!"

"And then when he does come, do you expect him to telephone to me?"

"Oh, no, no, no! You take rooms in some adjacent house and—er—watch; I don't mean watch too closely, but—er—well, I could send you word."

The expert smiled pityingly.

"Confine yourself to writing, my dear Chapel," said he. "Your plan is well-intentioned but ridiculous. Don't you understand that this man is abnormal? His diseased fancy will drag him back whether I am here or not. We are dealing with a monster, not a man like ourselves. In fact, my only fear is that they may make out a plea of insanity."

"Would that get him off?" asked Felix eagerly.

"It might," said Buffington gloomily, "there's a mania for letting lunatics go unhung!"

A gleam of hope shot through Mr. Molyneux's breast. Should he develop maniacal symptoms at once? Or should he wait a little longer? He decided to keep this card up his sleeve in the meantime.

"Then you don't think there's anything in my idea?"

"I don't," said Buffington emphatically.

Felix fell silent, the clouds settling thicker than ever. The more he thought of it, the more he distrusted his own powers of convincing an average jury by a lifelike imitation of lunacy. Exquisitely refined though he was, he actually cursed Buffington's obstinate adherence to his inconvenient theory.

"Dash his theory! Dash it!" he said to himself with almost terrible vehemence, and then subsiding into quieter gloom repeated, "I shall be hanged! I shall be hanged!"

That night James Buffington had a curious experience. He was sleeping the sleep of the successful when suddenly at an hour which he afterwards discovered to be 3.30, he awoke with a faint sound of whispered voices in his ear. He listened intently. Some one was certainly talking in a guarded voice out on the landing. For an instant his blood ran cold. He had not contemplated the murderer's return at this nerve-shaking hour! He blamed himself severely for failing to realize sooner that this was precisely the hour at which he most probably

would come back; and also that the danger would not be on Molyneux's side only.

Then in rapid succession it occurred to him that a constable was on duty in the house, that the last thing that the murderer would do would be to talk on the landing, and that the voice was singularly like Felix Chapel's.

He slipped out of bed, switched on the light, and opened the door gently. Quite distinctly he heard the words:

"I see, I see; if you'll write it, I'll——"

He heard no more, for in craning his neck to see, the door creaked and Felix broke off with a gasp of terror.

"What the devil's up?" inquired Buffington, stepping out. He saw only his colleague shivering in a blue dressing gown. Something like a very faint sound overhead drew his attention, but on looking up his eyes met nothing but a closed trap-door.

"I—I—must have—er——" stammered Felix.

"What; walking in your sleep, old man?" said Buffington soothingly.

"That—that was it," murmured Felix. "I'm sorry for disturbing you."

He slunk off to his room.

"Rum bird!" said the journalist.

It was in the course of that morning that Buffington made his next momentous discovery. He had been giving Chapel some serious counsel on the advisability of seeing a doctor, and at its conclusion

Felix had proposed his glancing through a volume of essays compiled by the criminal himself.

"To see what sort of a man he is," he had suggested.

As the effusions of a morbid mind, these naturally were not without interest to the expert. He turned over the leaves for a few minutes and then gave a stifled exclamation.

"Chapel!" he cried. "I've got him! Look at this—left in the book!"

He held out a sheet of notepaper on which were written these significant words:

"My own Irwin,

"Yes, do it to-night. I shall go straight to Aberdeen and await you there. Join me as soon as you have thrown them off the scent.

"Eva."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Felix. "How—how odd!"

"Odd!" shouted Buffington. "Odd? Don't you see what this is? A note written by Wilson to Molyneux? It's her writing—I know it—I found a laundry list—I've studied it till I know it by heart! They're in Aberdeen!"

"So they—er—must be!" agreed Felix.

Buffington laid his hand on his shoulder.

"This is up to me!" he said. "Chapel, old man, not a word to Bray or any one else. I'm off to Aberdeen!"

He had packed and was off in time to catch the two o'clock train from Euston.

A little later the legs of the essayist might have been seen (but fortunately were not) planted upon a step-ladder. His head was enveloped in the dusk of the attic.

"It worked beautifully!" he said. "He's off! The only thing I regret is that I hadn't studied the A. B. C. Time-table more thoroughly. Aberdeen is only 523 miles away, and I find there's a place called Wick which is 755 miles. I wish we'd sent him there."

"Let us be thankful he's gone as far as he has!" said a soft voice out of the gloom.

But the essayist found optimism came hard.

"That's all very well," he said unhappily, "but this is only temporary relief; he'll be back again, you know. And then—good Heavens!—what else can we do? Please—please think!"

"You are writing an account of the crime, aren't you?"

"I regret to say I am."

"You must divert suspicion from us."

"How?"

The girl's voice grew hushed and confidential.

PART IV

THE CHASE

I

THE objections to crime have been enumerated by so many thoughtful writers, and enlarged upon from so many pulpits, that it may seem presumptuous to say a word on the subject here.

Yet it does seem to the present historian that one aspect of the case has been somewhat overlooked, and that is the embarrassment caused among the criminal's relations, if they are at all sensitive people. Surely the prospective scoundrel would pause if he only realized the pain he was going to give his aunts and cousins. It is to be hoped that all such will make a point of reading this story.

The Bishop of Bedford, his wife, and his eleven children formed one of the best regulated families to be found anywhere, and the shock they sustained by their relative's notoriety was severe. The prelate himself was sometimes tempted to wish that his sense of duty had not been so abnormally keen, and that he had left the police to discover the delinquencies of Irwin Molyneux for themselves. In spite of his strongly worded letters of protest to Mr. Cadbury and the other zealous publicists who were investigating the matter, they would persist in bringing in his

relationship to the disgraced essayist in almost every issue.

He was variously described as "the Right Reverend uncle of the man Molyneux," "the revered and sorrowing father of the missing woman," and "the distinguished prelate, brother of the notorious Irwin Molyneux." By no chance (in spite of his public explanations) was he ever permitted to assume a more distant relationship. He was said to be "broken-hearted," "crushed by this terrible and undeserved affliction," "bravely bearing up against the overwhelming grief caused by his son's (or brother's, or nephew's) misconduct," and was even consigned to a bed of sickness on several occasions.

In this cruel situation it would have been some solace had he been able to find in the episcopal palace that tender and uncritical sympathy which he felt he deserved, if ever a bishop did. But unfortunately Mrs. Soper (wife of the right reverend gentleman) failed him grievously. He was pained by the perversity with which she would insist that if he had left things alone they might have been spared this affliction, and dismayed by the mutinous echo from his eleven olive branches.

In vain he endeavored to introduce into his household something of that spirit of awe with which he was regarded by the rest of the diocese. He found he had been indulgent too long. For the sake of a quiet life he had left Mrs. Soper practically unrebuked for five-and-twenty years, and now he realized with sorrow the consequence of his weakness. She

reproached him in the presence of his children, of his servants, even of his clergy. She used crisp, blunt nouns and uncompromising adjectives to describe his conduct. If he raised his voice she raised hers higher. If he appealed to her womanly sympathy, she told him roundly she was unable to give it to a man who had wantonly and deliberately brought this trouble on the heads of eleven young and blameless Sopers.

"It is all very well to blame me, my dear," he ventured to protest in a moment of extreme exasperation, "but I should like to know what you would have done yourself."

"I should have had the sense to use a little forethought!" she retorted. "If you had thought for a moment you would have seen that you couldn't call in the police without making the whole thing public, and that you couldn't make it public without dragging our names into it."

"But my duty seemed so clear——"

"Your first duty is to your wife and children!"

He looked as severely ecclesiastical as he ever could at home.

"Pardon me, my dear; a bishop has duties which are higher even——"

"That is nonsense, and you know it," she interrupted, without heat, yet with emphasis. "What one is merely paid to do can never be one's highest duty. Besides, you certainly weren't paid to poke your nose into Irwin Molyneux's business, so that in any case it wasn't your duty."

"Did I wish to take advantage of your faulty logic, my dear, I could retort——"

"I am not talking logic, I am talking sense!"

"But, my love, at least be as reasonable as you can. You surely would not have had me hush up the mysterious and suspicious disappearance of Irwin's wife?"

"Why shouldn't she disappear if she wanted to? I am sure I should want to disappear frequently if I were long in the society of an unpractical, absent-minded, ridiculous creature like Irwin."

"But, good gracious me, you surely don't insinuate that she disappeared of her own accord?"

"Why shouldn't she? People who disappear generally do. Look at that bank clerk only last week. He disappeared of his own accord."

"Tut, tut, tut!" cried the unfortunate Bishop. "It is really hopeless arguing with you at this rate. Do you actually go the length of saying she murdered herself and buried her own bones in the garden?"

"May I ask what Harriet Molyneux's bones have to do with your starting this scandal in another man's house and making life unendurable for your wife and children?"

The Bishop wrung his hands, and did not even attempt to answer this conundrum. Mrs. Soper relentlessly followed up her victory.

"The least you can do is to take me abroad till the scandal has subsided."

The Bishop pondered.

"Are you quite certain that we had not better remain in the privacy of our own home? If we go abroad we shall, as it were, drag ourselves into a fiercer light of publicity. To see one's name in the papers is bad enough, but actually to perceive the fingers of the curious pointing, so to speak, at one's person, would be an ordeal to which I do not care to expose mysel—er—my wife."

"We could go abroad *incognito*."

Again the Bishop reflected.

"For the last forty-eight hours," he said at length, "there has been a comparative lull in the issue of these dastardly allusions. It may be that a worthier spirit is awakening in our Press. Let us give the fourth estate another chance, my dear. If the disgraceful liberties are renewed, I promise I shall take you abroad."

With this concession Mrs. Soper's spirits rose considerably. She communicated her satisfaction to her children, and the palace resumed its air of austere harmony.

That evening the Bishop sat down with a comparatively tranquil mind to compose the second of a series of epoch-making sermons. He had long enjoyed one of the highest reputations in England for militant purity, and this had reached its apex on the recent publication in a sixpenny form of his discourses on the Decadence of English Morals (with a portrait of the pious author on the cover). A demand for another series of these reverberating warnings was urged by clergy and laity alike.

"Without doubt, my love," he had informed his (at that time) admiring spouse, "this request is in the nature of a Call. The gifts of a pure mind and honest voice, which without vanity I believe I may claim, were not given me to be hid beneath a bushel; especially in view of my publisher's statement of the returns of my first series. I conceive it to be my duty to concede to this, I may almost say, universal demand."

The first of this new series had been an immense success. As he bent his intellectual brows over a clean sheet of foolscap, he promised himself that the second should be a veritable rouser.

With a profound sense of his responsibilities, he began to jot down a few preliminary notes. "Prurient Literature," he wrote at the top of the page, and paused to contemplate with sombre satisfaction this promising beginning. Next he proceeded to particulars: "Child-like literary tastes to be cultivated in youth and maintained in maturity—Debased state of Continental literature—How thankful we should be for purity of *Punch, Pickwick, Sorrows of Satan,* and other English classics! Literary Censorship desirable—Guilt not merely of writers but also of readers of pernicious books—Stirring appeal to all readers present, illustrated by many awful warnings." And then in the margin—"Mem. Collect few awful warnings."

It was at this unseasonable moment that Mrs. Soper interrupted her husband's meditations.

II

"WELL?" demanded the Bishop severely.

"Septimus," cried his wife, "the consequences of your conduct have penetrated even to your nursery! Look at this!"

He took from her hand an attractively bound copy of what appeared to be a popular periodical.

"The—ah—*Something-for-All-of-You Magazine,*" he read out. "Well, my love——"

"I found that in Evangeline's hands!" she cried. "A child of eight reading of her father's shame! Septimus, it is the last straw."

With startled eyes he followed her finger as it pointed to an article entitled "'The Great Hyacinth Road Mystery,' by Felix Chapel."

"The first of twelve instalments!" she said bitterly. "And the despicable creature who concocts the thing seems to take a positive delight in painting your own conduct in the worst colors! He is much more down on you than he is on Irwin Molyneux. Listen to this!"

She snatched the magazine from his hands and read aloud this extract:

"At this juncture the Bishop of Bedford appeared upon the scene. It is an open secret that in his younger days this venerable gentleman was known to his schoolfellows by the

humorous nickname of 'Nosey'; possibly from the prominence of that organ, or, more likely, from his habit of pushing it into the concerns of his companions. Something of the same spirit of inquiry still attaches to him in the exalted position which he now occupies."

"Were you ever called Nosey, Septimus?"

"I—ah——" stammered the unhappy Bishop.

"You were!" she cried. "And upon my word you deserved it!"

Unheeding his look of majestic indignation, she proceeded to read him another passage.

"It now seems to have occurred to the Bishop that he had a unique opportunity of repaying the hospitality of his relatives. Our readers must, of course, remember that the true solution of the mystery has not yet been discovered even by the intelligent Buffington; and whether the unfortunate Irwin Molyneux or some one else in the house was the real cause of Mrs. Molyneux's disappearance remains to be proved."

The lady's voice rose to a shout.

"'Some one else in the house!' He means you, Septimus!"

"Me!" cried the unfortunate prelate. "Impossible! This is too—too——"

"Look!" she said, pointing a quivering finger at the page. "It gets worse as it goes on!"

With horrified eyes the Bishop read:

"In order to obtain a clear and unbiassed survey of this remarkable case, it is essential that the following vital fact be carefully borne in mind; namely, that the tête-à-tête din-

ner, the absence at the meal of Mrs. Molyneux, the improbable explanations of her husband and his flight next morning, *rest solely on the evidence of one witness.* Is this witness reliable? Is he perfectly disinterested? Has *he* nothing to conceal? Is it *quite certain* that Mrs. Molyneux was not present when he arrived? Is it not possible that her husband, instead of causing her fate, *shared it?* Might not the same hand which struck them *both* down have afterwards removed by similar means the tell-tale evidence of Eva Wilson? This alternative must be faced."

"We must certainly go abroad!" cried the Bishop. "This is too awful, too scandalous, too disgraceful! We must go at once! The man evidently has a personal private spite against me! Who is he? Where does he get all these particulars? They are erroneous, utterly false, of course; but where does he get them?"

"It says at the beginning of the article that Felix Chapel is at present residing at 47 Hyacinth Road."

"Residing there!" exclaimed the Bishop, suddenly turning very pale. "But that is worse, that is dreadful, he may discover——"

He stopped abruptly, but his wife's eyes remained riveted upon him.

"Discover what?" she demanded.

He hesitated.

"Er—nothing."

She looked at him acutely.

"What else have you been doing?"

"What else have *I?* Thank Heaven, beyond doing what I conceived to be my duty——"

"Oh, yes," she interrupted, "I know all that. You might as well come straight to the point. What else are you afraid of?"

"I am *afraid* of nothing, my love; but it is essential—absolutely essential—that in the face of these abominable insinuations, my character should—er—be above reproach——"

"What reproach?"

"I—er—mean—ah—above the possibility of having dirt vilely hurled at it!"

"Septimus! Say distinctly what you mean."

"I only mean that—er—it might be awkward; that is to say unclean minds might think it awkward, if—er—in short, my dear, the fact—the fact is that, as you are aware, I occasionally endeavor to exercise my French."

"I was not aware of it."

"Oh, surely, my love——"

"No, my dear, I was not. You have been remarkably secretive about it."

"Well, it is the case that occasionally—very occasionally—I do renew my acquaintance with that—er—elegant and—ah—chaste language."

"H'm," commented Mrs. Soper. "When, may I ask, did you *begin* your acquaintance with that chaste language?"

"In Paris many—very many years ago."

"And how do you keep it up now?"

"By reading some modern masterpiece of fiction. I happened to have one in my bag on the occasion of my visit to Irwin Molyneux, and unfortunately I—

ah—well, in short, I forgot to bring it away with me."

"Do you mean to tell me you are making this fuss because you have lost a French novel? Septimus, I am ashamed of you!"

"Oh, no, no, no, my love! You misapprehend me altogether. What annoys me is merely this: the house is at present in the possession of this miserable journalist."

"You need not be in the least afraid of corrupting a journalist," she interrupted, with conviction.

"But, my dear, the fact is my name was on that novel."

Mrs. Soper looked at him stonily.

"Was it a very scandalous book?"

"Scandalous? Well, my love——"

"Was it a book you would be ashamed to be seen reading?"

"Ashamed, my dear? I trust I am ashamed of nothing."

"Would you like your children to catch you reading it?"

"At their ages I should not willingly have them *observe* me reading——"

"What was it called?"

"It was—ah—a French title; written in French, you understand. I—I forget exactly——"

"What was it about?"

"There was—er—a lady in it, and a gentleman."

"Were they married?"

"She was married to one of them."

"How many others were there?"

"I had only reached the fifth chapter."

"How many others had you discovered so far?"

"T—two. I think there were only two so far."

Mrs. Soper's face assumed its sternest expression.

"It was a *disgusting* book!" she pronounced. "And, if you don't feel ashamed of yourself, you ought to! What will become of your reputation if that book is discovered with your name in it?"

Like some majestic elephant stricken by a murderous bullet, the hapless Bishop trumpeted:

"It will damage my reputation irretrievably! If this person brings it into his despicable narrative, I am lost! Oh, my love——"

She interrupted him with severity.

"Under the circumstances I prefer not to hear that term coming so glibly from your lips."

The lady meditated.

"Septimus," she said at length, "for the sake of your wife and children you have got to recover that book."

"But how?"

"With a little ingenuity it can easily be managed—and it *must* be managed. That is quite certain."

"It must be!" he boomed tragically. "It must be!"

III

THE consequences of one single lapse may fill a volume—and occasionally do. The present author had been taught this theoretically before he began to study this extraordinary case, and in the course of its investigation he has learned the poignant truth of those early lessons.

In addition to relatives, Irwin Molyneux had neighbors. On either side of his little villa, detached from it but closely adjacent, stood a pair of bijou mansions designed in the choicest early Victorian taste. With neither his neighbor on the right nor his neighbor on the left, had he held any previous communication, both he and his lost wife being averse from making promiscuous acquaintances; while on their part, these neighbors had been aware indeed of his existence, but wholly uninterested in it. But now the mere fact of his having removed a lady, who after all was his wife not theirs, had affected them like a dreadful epidemic. Within forty-eight hours after the first posters had introduced Hyacinth Road to contemporary history, the blinds of No. 49 were down, a board in the front garden announced that it was "to be let or sold," and its late occupants had retired to the furthest corner of London.

Such were the calamitous consequences on the right

hand. Equally profound but far different was the effect on the left.

Next door to No. 47, in the opposite direction, stood No. 45, an equally secluded residence, but considerably larger, as became the abode of so famous a personage as Signor Dado di Fresco.

At that time he was at the very height of his popularity. His dulcet tenor voice might be heard of a fine summer's evening pouring its delicious strains out of a hundred thousand gramophones. When he appeared at Covent Garden every seat was booked weeks ahead; when he appeared in New York, in Paris, in Berlin, in Vienna it was exactly the same. He was, in fact, the tenor of the hour.

And not only did he sing with a vigor unparalleled within this generation, but his emotional temperament was equally adapted to the histrionic art. Let him but catch one glint of the footlights, and he would fight, he would make love, he would die, in a fashion that thrilled the most phlegmatic.

As was natural with a man of such gifts, his private life was not altogether devoid of dramatic episodes. The present Signora di Fresco was at least the third lady who had held that enviable position; and in numerous other respects he had shown himself no mere spectator of life. So high, in fact, was his spirit that he used frequently to long for the chance of emulating the warlike and tragic exploits of the heroes he impersonated.

"That would, indeed, be living!" he used to cry.

And the Signora would reply with a smile:

"Ah, Dado, how thankful I am that we live in St. John's Wood, and not in California! You would be shot with a bullet—oh, for certain!—out there."

Whereupon Dado would curl his moustache and reply darkly:

"Or I would shoot mine enemy first!"

And then, like a thunder-clap on Derby Day, came the sudden and terrible intimation that even St. John's Wood had its death-dealing bravos. On the memorable night when he bought an evening paper containing the news of the tragedy at No. 47 the Signor never slept a single wink. On the morrow he wandered from house to garden, from garden to house, sometimes peering through a chink in his blinds (which, with a nice sense of drama, he drew down on the side of his house next 47); sometimes on tiptoe on top of his garden roller, his head concealed by the spreading branches of a laburnum, staring over the garden wall into the chosen haunt of tragedy next door.

By the afternoon he could no longer rest, a mere inert spectator, and, running out, he rang at his erring neighbor's door, and demanded to see Inspector Bray.

"I have come," he announced, "to help you to revenge her!"

The Inspector looked at him fixedly.

"Tube to Westminster Bridge Road, and then ask."

"Ask!" exclaimed the artist. "Ask what?"

"The way to Bedlam," said the Inspector coldly, and indicated that the interview was at an end.

Signor Fresco's pride was deeply wounded, but his enthusiasm was undamped. Henceforth he devoted himself to a single-handed study of the mystery. It became his one ambition to anticipate the brutal Inspector in its solution.

"I shall teach these detectives," he repeated. "I shall teach them!"

The appearance on the scene of James Buffington did not please him. At that moment the *Evening Tribune* had the misfortune to be under his ban, owing to a recent display of inaptitude in its operatic notes. It had actually been guilty of describing him as "almost the greatest tenor of any age or era." "Almost!" shrieked the outraged artist; and to him henceforth that journal was as though it did not exist.

Then came the news that Felix Chapel had come to reside in the house of mystery and harness the dark drama to the ends of art; and the lamp of enthusiasm burned afresh.

"Perhaps *he* may not be so unworthy of a Fresco's acquaintance!" he exclaimed.

Pacing his drawing-room, he ruminated on this new factor; his eloquent gesticulations marking the progress of his thoughts. Then with a flash of inspiration he announced:

"Yes, that is it! We shall work together, this Chapel and I!"

Little anticipating the consequences of this resolve,

the Signora indulgently smiled her approval (for she had early learnt that tenors must be humored), and Dado set at once about making a preliminary study of his proposed ally. But this he discovered to be by no means easy. Mr. Chapel seemed to be of an extraordinarily secretive disposition. Though the Signor spent hours in peeping out of his windows, or standing on his roller, it was three full days before he caught so much as a glimpse of him. Then at last, in the dusk of a rainy afternoon, he caught sight of Felix Chapel walking in the garden.

The Signor was inclined to be favorably impressed with Mr. Chapel's appearance.

"He is an artist like myself!" he thought. "We shall have a fellow feeling!"

In the course of one or two subsequent glimpses (for Mr. Chapel showed himself seldom and never for long at a time) this favorable impression deepened. In fact the only fault Signor Fresco could find with his new neighbor was of the most trifling and even ludicrous nature; a blemish which only the sensitive taste of a great artist would have noticed at all. Mr. Chapel, he observed, had a habit of removing his slouch hat at brief intervals and somewhat vigorously scratching his head, though apart from this he seemed a perfect gentleman.

On the next day Fresco observed Buffington's departure with his portmanteau for Aberdeen. Now, at the very earliest opportunity, he had fully resolved to make his neighbor's acquaintance, when a very

strange and startling occurrence abruptly modified his plans.

It was a singularly fine and mild afternoon for the season, and Signor Fresco was pacing his lawn, humming gently the air of his latest success, when he heard on the other side of the wall a sound as of some one digging.

"Perhaps," he thought, "I shall find my chance of making his acquaintance now!"

Very quietly he stepped up on to his roller and peeped over the wall; and there he saw, digging quietly within a few yards of him—the missing man Molyneux himself!

By holding tightly on to the wall the Signor just managed to save himself from falling off the roller. His heart thumped like a steam-hammer, his eyes swam, his brain reeled, and all the time Irwin Molyneux went on digging.

All at once there came down the garden the sound of a bell ringing in the basement of No. 47. So sensitive was Fresco to all manner of sounds that he was even able to recognize it as the bell of his neighbor's front door. Molyneux started guiltily, stood for one instant listening, and then throwing down his spade, ran headlong for the house.

And then at last Signor Fresco recovered his stunned senses. He let go the wall, slid off the roller, picked himself out of the flower-bed, and ran with equal speed towards his own house.

"This is real life at last!" he cried to the as-

tounded Signora. "It is not Fresco, the artist, but Fresco, the man, who now addresses you!"

"What shall you do? Will you send for the police?" she gasped.

"The police!" he answered, with swelling chest. "No fear! They have despised me, but I shall show them! I shall capture the murderer myself. Yes, alone Fresco shall do it!"

"Dado!" she shrieked. "You will do nothing of the kind! My own Dado! No, no!"

But though Dado loved her passionately, and as a rule humored her wildest excesses of affection—even to the length of wearing a flannel waistband winter and summer—she found him adamant now.

"Alone I shall do it!" he repeated, and, with a sinking heart, she realized that his decision was final.

"But how?" she asked, through her tears.

"I shall take my gun!"

The Signor sprang to his gun-case and unfastened the buckles of the straps with frenzied vigor. He had shot his first running rabbit that winter, and having once tasted blood, there was no more enthusiastic sportsman in England. The Signora knew there was no holding him back now.

Suddenly he paused and surveyed himself dubiously.

"But these clothes!" he murmured critically, with the true artist's sense of fitness. "No, no, I cannot shoot attired like this!"

A gleam of hope lit the Signora's beautiful eyes.

"True, Dado, true!" she cried. "Ah, you must

wear your knickerbockers! You looked divine in the knickerbocker!"

"My better angel!" he replied. "Yes, I shall put on my knickerbockers!"

He vanished even as he spoke, and the next moment the trembling lady departed also.

IV

With shaking hands Irwin Molyneux pulled on his wig; with hands that shook still more he endeavored to make his romantic moustache adhere; and all the time the front-door bell kept ringing.

"How rash of me to take them off at this hour!" he thought bitterly. "How singularly rash! They were really too irritating for words, but I must learn to endure it! Perhaps I may have to wear them all my life—or perhaps this act of folly may have cost me my life!"

The error was grave, but the temptation had been strong. As both Bray and Buffington were now looking further afield for the criminal, the constable had been withdrawn from the house. Irwin had given his cook an afternoon out, and it seemed so safe to indulge a passionate whim for airing his imprisoned scalp.

And now some one was actually ringing at the bell of this forbidden house!

People gave it a wide berth nowadays. Who in Heaven's name could this ringer be? He thought of a hundred possibilities, and then with a joyful start exclaimed:

"Harriet! It must be! She has come back!"

So strongly did this idea possess him that he hardly

waited to complete his toilet, and ran downstairs with a heart already light. He opened the door.

"Mr. Chapel, I presume?" said a strangely familiar voice.

For a moment Felix Chapel's tongue refused to utter a sound.

"Ye-es," he stammered at last.

"My name is Mr. Soper," said his visitor. "May I enter?"

Had it not been for his express declaration, Felix would certainly have taken him for the Bishop of Bedford. In fact, in spite of his assurance, he felt precisely the same sensations as if that formidable prelate himself had entered the house. It was true that the visitor wore no gaiters and held in his hand an ordinary silk hat; otherwise he and the divine were exactly alike.

"I have called," Mr. Soper continued, "in consequence of reading your remarkably interesting account of the sad events that lately took place in this house. It is a liberty, I am aware, but really, Mr. Chapel, I found—ah—the temptation extremely strong to see—er—the scene of—ah—that—er—tragedy."

Felix did not know whether to feel reassured or the more alarmed on discovering the remarkable fact that his visitor appeared as nervous as himself.

"What can I d—do for you?" he inquired unsteadily.

Mr. Soper's voice likewise shook a little.

"M—might I—er—inspect the apartments which —er—have such tragic associations?"

"Cer—certainly."

"I don't wish to—ah—take up your time, Mr. Chapel."

"You w—won't," said Felix hurriedly. "I'll—I—leave you."

Mr. Soper gave what seemed a gasp of relief.

"Th—thank you!" he exclaimed eagerly.

"N—not at all," murmured Felix, from halfway upstairs.

A minute later he was locked in his bedroom, endeavoring to conceal the MS. of his next instalment between the blankets and the mattress. It contained some remarkably pungent criticisms on the Bishop of Bedford.

V

Signor Dado di Fresco emerged from his house fully equipped. Though perhaps lacking in inches, if merely measured perpendicularly, he was of very fine proportions indeed, if his circumference were added; his legs filled his checked knickerbockers bravely; on his head a green felt hat with a feather in it sat jauntily; and, take him for all in all, he was as formidable looking a tenor as ever carried a gun. Under his other arm he bore a short, workmanlike ladder, and by means of this he mounted on top of the garden wall, and gazed steadily for some minutes through the overhanging branches of the laburnum.

Suddenly his eye glinted, and his color changed. Through the library window of No. 47 he distinctly saw some one moving. He paused no longer than a brave man should, and then descended on the further side, ladder and all. There he halted, and proceeded to load his gun. For a moment he felt a little puzzled as to which cartridges he should use. He had taken a pocketful at random, and, looking at the numbers printed on them, he strove to remember whether a high number implied a large-sized shot. Finally he decided it did, and slipped a No. 10 cartridge into either barrel. And then he stealthily advanced.

No. 47 was one of those houses which look two stories high in front, and turn out to be three stories high behind, so that the library window, instead of being near the ground, was some fifteen feet higher up. Signor Fresco gently placed his ladder against the wall. It just reached! Without haste, yet without faltering, he ascended till he could just see over the window sill, and then once more he experienced that sensation which even the bravest sometimes feel when they actually see their enemy face to face. This time he could not literally see the miscreant's countenance, but he got a splendid view of his back as he bent over the fire. For a few long seconds Dado di Fresco watched him intently. He was now dressed, he observed, in a long clergyman's frock-coat—of all shameless disguises—and he was engaged in the obviously nefarious act of poking what seemed to be a book into the flames, and holding it there till it was consumed.

To one of his fiery Latin race the need for instant action was imperative. But what should he do? If he tried to open the window and enter, the murderer would certainly take alarm and escape. There was but one alternative. He must shoot him on the spot.

Having once decided, it took Fresco not a moment to act. There was barely room on the ladder to get his weapon to his shoulder, but he just managed it; and, closing one eye, aimed carefully at the broad of the murderer's back. Then his finger pressed the trigger.

The brave Signor had omitted to allow for only

two factors. One was the presence of the lower sash of the window hard against the muzzle of his gun; the other was the recoil, especially the recoil under such circumstances.

Bang! Dado di Fresco was conscious of such a terrific blow on the shoulder as only the most desperate criminal could possibly have inflicted, and then he felt himself travelling rapidly backwards through space. After that all was darkness for the next ten minutes.

When he came to his senses he found himself in the arms of the weeping Signora, while Felix Chapel and Inspector Bray stood over him with an air of considerable concern.

"He lives!" cried the Signora. "Ah, Heaven be praised, he lives!"

The devoted lady had acted as promptly as her spouse. The moment his back was turned she had summoned the police, but so impetuous had been the Signor's movements that the Inspector only arrived on the scene in time to assist in the work of resuscitating the fallen hero.

As soon as he had sufficiently recovered, Signor Fresco gave them an accurate and detailed account of his adventure—how, just as he was going to fire, the murderer had turned, rushed at him with an expression of diabolical fury, torn the gun from his hands even as it exploded, struck him a terrific blow on the shoulder with the butt end, shouted the words (the Signor heard him distinctly): "I have done for another of you!" and then fled from the room.

The Inspector bent his gimlet eyes upon the artist. He examined his ingenuous countenance, and seemed to find that tolerably satisfactory. He examined his knickerbockers, and evidently found them a trifle suspicious. He examined his feathered hat, and clearly grew sceptical. *He* knew what was honest English and what was not! Then he examined the window.

"This window has never been opened," he said.

"But I saw it!" shouted the Signor.

"Looks like sparrow hail," commented the Inspector, picking some of the shot out of the sash with his pen-knife.

"Sparrow? It was Molyneux the murderer!" cried Fresco.

"Clergyman's clothes he wore, did he?" demanded the Inspector.

"I swear to it!"

"And you actually saw him digging in the garden?"

"I swear—I swear!"

The Inspector began to shake his head. He had dealt with imaginative foreigners before.

"What was he digging—potatoes?" he inquired satirically.

"He dug for his wife—for more of her bones!"

Inspector Bray seemed a little struck with this suggestion, yet his eye remained sceptical. To admit that Buffington had been right was asking a little too much of a practical man.

All this time Felix Chapel had been standing by

with a troubled air. Now, of a sudden, he saw, as if illuminated by a lightning flash, exactly what a resourceful criminal ought to do.

"Inspector," he said, "I saw him too!"

"You!" cried the Inspector. "Where were you?"

"In my—let me see?—yes, in my bedroom. I happened to glance out of the window more or less inadvertently—don't you know——"

"I don't know," said the Inspector drily. "And what did you see?"

"I saw Irwin Molyneux running into the house."

"Bravo!" cried Dado. "Noble friend! I thank you!"

Inspector Bray remained entirely unmoved.

"Then why didn't you come down sooner?"

The flash of inspiration flickered out.

"I—I was looking for—er—a pair of—er—suitable shoes."

Inspector Bray was convinced at last.

"Funked it? I quite understand," he said, and his eye gleamed again purposefully. "It *was* Molyneux then! Now the thing is to see whether he has left any traces of his little visit!"

Like a terrier on the scent he started for the flower bed. Felix started after him.

"Inspector! Inspector!" he cried. "Excuse me, but really I must protest—it wasn't fear that delayed me!"

The Inspector merely smiled sardonically, and the misunderstood gentleman turned to Signor Fresco.

"You, sir, will believe me!"

But the Signor's good-nature had frozen into haughty disdain. Even the Signora drew her skirts aside as she passed the poltroon.

"Hang it!" said Felix. "Hang it!"

Inspector Bray searched the flower bed where the fugitive had been digging, but found not a single buried bone to reward him, much less the rest of the murdered lady, as the Signor hoped. He rescued a few fragments of the burnt book from the grate, but beyond the fact that it seemed to have been written in the French language, there was nothing to throw light on the mystery. And then, at last, lying inconspicuously in a corner of the library, he found the memorable clue. It was simply a creased slip of paper with these curious words inscribed upon it:—Memo. Shaving brush. 2 pairs pyjamas. Book berths."

For once the reticent Bray was moved.

"He has left his memoranda behind him!" he cried. "'Book berths!' He is going abroad! But d—n it, when? And where? And what blessed steamer?"

Even the Signora forgave the violence of his language. She and her Dado clasped one another's hands, each passionately beseeching the other to "think—think hard—help with your intelligence the good Inspector."

"If one only knew the name he's going under!" muttered the Inspector.

"Soper," said an injured voice.

Inspector Bray stared.

"Soper?" he repeated.

Felix bowed stiffly and in silence.

"But how the—the blazes do you know?"

"Had you not interrupted me," replied the offended essayist, "I should have proceeded to explain that I *did* accost the individual in question, and learning that his name was merely Soper, I returned to my room."

"Is this 'umbug?" demanded the Inspector sternly.

"If you mean 'humbug,'" replied Felix cuttingly, "I can reassure you. It is a literally accurate account of what took place."

Inspector Bray gasped.

"Well, I'm jiggered! Of all the soft-'eaded idiots——!"

Words for the moment failed him. The next, he had recovered and was gone.

VI

On every side the North Atlantic rolled gray to an empty horizon. Overhead, there was nothing in the sky save a caravan of small pale gray clouds hurrying down from Iceland.

Solitary in this wilderness the *Roumelia* ploughed her way westward, a tiny fragment in the world of men adrift in these immensities.

In a quiet corner of the deck, with rugs about their knees, sat the Rev. Septimus Soper and his wife. These were their unassuming names in the passenger list; but nobody who had ever known the Bishop of Bedford would have hesitated to identify this Mrs. Soper with his spouse, or Mr. Soper (despite his lack of gaiters) with the prelate himself. Though the wind blew fresh, and there was enough sea to make the horizon a waving string of little gray-green lumps that rose and vanished and instantly rose again, the great ship ploughed through this small disturbance on an even keel, and the distinguished couple sitting there incognito appeared to be merely exhilarated.

"My love," said the divine, "I consider this trip a very happy inspiration of yours."

"Especially," she replied, "since we really do not seem to be recognized by anybody."

"It is a very remarkable fact—really very re-

markable," he observed, with what almost seemed a faint indication of disappointment. "Personally, I should hardly have thought it would be possible for so many of our countrymen to be ignorant of my appearance. The passengers must be largely Americans."

"But, Septimus, without your gaiters, who would dream it was you, even if they knew your face?"

He seemed consoled.

"True," he answered; "very true indeed. What a thorough disguise it makes!"

His wife suddenly touched his arm.

"That invalid again!" she said.

Supported on the arm of a steward, a muffled figure collapsed into a deck chair a few paces from them.

"I wish he would not persist in planting himself so unpleasantly near to us," frowned the Reverend Septimus. "When one was a curate, the proximity of the sick was all very well. I knew my duty and never flinched. But I abhor the ostentatious habit of superfluously courting disagreeable incidents."

"Septimus!" said his wife suddenly, "I do believe this is the same man who rushed on board at Queenstown just as we were starting! Look at his bull neck and his close-set eyes!"

"I did not see the individual at Queenstown; but this man does remind me of some one. Where can I have seen those eyes?"

"But the strange thing is that man I mean didn't look in the least like an invalid!" she persisted.

"You don't say so!" he exclaimed uneasily.

"Suppose, my dear, we moved our chairs? I object on principle both to mysterious and to diseased persons."

Meanwhile the muffled invalid was ruminating.

"Rum thing!" he said to himself as he concentrated the full keenness of the gimlet eyes upon the couple. "I never saw such a disguise in my life! It's almost incredible! But it *must* be them—with this information there *can't* be any mistake!"

The ship ploughed on, throwing sea-mile after sea-mile behind her, and always through an empty ocean. It seemed as though no company of mortals could be more utterly divorced from the rest of humanity. And yet, thanks to an enterprising Italian gentleman, every inhabitant of two whole continents who could read a newspaper was following the voyage of that ship as easily and intimately as though they were on board.

The waters of the North Atlantic were tolerably full of wireless messages before the *Roumelia* sailed upon her memorable voyage; but now every wavè vibrated. Those "bull-necked men" were holding converse with the public of two hemispheres, and in several thousand suburban trains such bulletins as this were twice daily being devoured:

"Molyneux and the woman Eva Wilson breakfasted this morning in their state-room upon a couple of lightly-boiled eggs, a pot of tea, and several thin slices of toast and butter.

"They are holding themselves conspicuously aloof from the rest of the passengers, though their disguise is so complete

that no suspicion of their identity seems to have got abroad as yet.

"The man has succeeded in transforming himself into what is to all outward appearance a stout elderly clergyman of dignified appearance and arrogant manners.

"But perhaps the woman Wilson has shown even more startling skill. No trace whatever of the alluring siren meets the eye. She would pass for a respectable woman of quite fifty, with a somewhat acid expression and a loud decisive voice.

"Bray shadows them night and day, though it is not his present intention to effect an arrest till the *Roumelia* reaches New York."

Sometimes the baldness of the Inspector's reports would be relieved by the art of the Fleet Street literary experts, and this piece of fine descriptive writing meets the eye:

"To-day was luxuriously fine. The heavens shone refulgently upon our stately masterpiece of modern comforts and mechanism, which so rapidly is bearing us in the wake of Columbus. Molyneux and Wilson took the air upon the promenade deck for three-quarters of an hour this morning and were observed conversing in hushed and earnest voices.

"What dark thoughts were these two guilty creatures interchanging? Do they really expect to evade the inexorable law they have so wantonly violated? Ah, who can tell! These are but speculations. In the guise of an invalid passenger stretched in a deck-chair in as close proximity to the notorious couple as prudence warrants, Bray keeps his eye ever upon them.

"Sometimes they seem to be conscious of his gaze, and, from certain indications perceived by him, it seems probable they have a dawning suspicion they are being shadowed.

"Captain Cuttle also has them under his constant supervision. Beyond the gallant captain and his first and second officers, no one else on board has been informed of the identity of the couple."

Lest there should be any lingering doubts in the minds of a righteously indignant public that every precaution was being taken to see justice done, the gallant Captain Cuttle himself supplied daily bulletins to the Press. These, as was natural, were couched in a breezy and manly style, and fully earned the unprecedented fee which rewarded this daring seaman's first plunge into literature. They would run in this vein:

"All going strong. Am keeping my weather eye open. Inform England she can depend upon my doing my duty."

And on the receipt of each of these assurances England would heave a sigh of relief, and a thousand more picture post-cards of Captain Cuttle be sold.

Meanwhile the shadowed couple continued to congratulate themselves.

VII

THE morning of the *Roumelia's* second last day at sea dawned gray and still. By noon the sun was bright, there was scarcely a cloud in the sky, and one could see clearly to the farthest horizon. About five o'clock in the afternoon a certain excitement was observed among the ship's officers and crew, and within a few minutes the news had spread among the passengers that a raft covered with shipwrecked mariners, and flying a pink flannel shirt at the end of an oar in token of distress, had been observed by the sailor on the look-out. The ship's course was altered a few points to starboard, her engines revolved more slowly, and presently they were lying-to in a gentle oily swell, with every glass on board directed on the unhappy band of castaways. A boat was swiftly lowered, and a loud cheer rose from the sympathetic onlookers as they saw the first tattered figure lifted by strong arms from his precarious refuge. They cheered exactly thirty-five times ere the last of the shipwrecked band was safely in the boat.

With painful attention they watched the boat return. The strangers sat huddled together, so haggard and woe-begone that instead of a fresh cheer, murmurs of sympathy were to be heard on every

hand as one after another they swarmed up the side and stepped aboard.

Captain Cuttle came forward to greet them, but the tall man who came first on board made no response till he had seen his companions safely at his side. Then he uttered but two words:

"Hands up!"

And instantly thirty-five revolvers were levelled at the astounded crowd. Then the tall man spoke again. His manner was reassuring, his accents bland, but his tone perfectly firm.

"Captain Cuttle, ladies, and gentlemen," he said, "there is not the slightest necessity to feel alarmed. You are in a sense even safer than you were before. You are now, in fact, under the protection of the free, enlightened, and beneficent Press of the United States of America. These boys, whose guns you have the pleasure of looking down the muzzles of, represent the cream of all that is snappiest and most up-to-date in American journalism. You can trust them as you could your own fathers; and if you care to say the words 'Drinks all round!' when we have finished our business, there ain't one of us as'll say 'No, thanks.' It is our one regret that we must keep you waiting a little while for that happy moment, but 'business before pleasure' were the words which one who could not tell a lie nailed to the star-spangled banner of freedom! Captain Cuttle, may I have a private word with you?"

He stepped aside with the captain (whose intelligent face had assumed an exceedingly sagacious look

in the course of this oration), pulled out an envelope, and handed it to the captain.

"Guess you'll find that a tolerably satisfactory letter of introduction," he said in a guarded voice.

The captain glanced at the contents, and his expression grew still more sagacious.

"Very handsome, indeed, sir," he replied. "What can I do for you?"

"In the first place, we want the exclusive rights in your wireless apparatus for the next twelve hours."

The captain nodded.

"Second place, ditto in this Soper couple."

A cry of protest, loud and strong, rose from beneath the tall man's elbow. Looking down he discovered a bull-necked, gimlet-eyed figure attired in a suit of hygienic frieze (so conscientiously had the invalid equipped himself); and with a face expressive of the highest indignation.

"Who are you, anyhow?" he inquired.

"I, sir," said the gimlet-eyed figure, "am Inspector Bray!"

"I guess Back-number begins with a B too; so the change won't hurt much anyway," replied the tall man calmly. "John Bull has fooled round long enough with this Molyneux mystery. It's Uncle Sam's turn to do the detecting business."

"But it was I who discovered them, I who tracked them, I who——"

The tall man interrupted him imperturbably.

"Once the eagle has started screaming she don't stop for the likes of you. Now just you make your-

self as scarce as if you'd broken your string and got lost, or this business 'll have to begin with a little shooting!"

Thus ended Inspector Bray's share in the drama of Number 47. All honor to the brave who have nearly succeeded!

That evening it was America's turn. In the heart of more than one patriotic Republican there had rankled a decided sense of grievance that the most startling domestic drama of modern times should have been played so exclusively in Great Britain; while, as live business men, they could not but regret that it should have been exploited in the inert and half-hearted fashion peculiar to nations which have not yet been governed by Theodore Roosevelt.

But all this was corrected now. The lower portion of Broadway was one seething mass of human beings; overhead stretched screen upon screen, and upon each and all of these flashed in letters nine feet high the latest bulletins from the *Roumelia*. They began with an account of the capture of the vessel infinitely more picturesque than the bald summary already given in these pages, but rather too long for reproduction. Then came the thrilling message:

"Molyneux and Eva Wilson in our experts' hands. Extraordinary audacity of murderer. Says he is a Bishop! We shall see!"

A death-like hush fell upon those waiting millions, and then out flashed these momentous words:

"Our experts proceeding to remove disguise. Molyneux immersed in hot bath. Signs of paint and whiskers dissolving. Confident of ultimate success."

The next bulletin was a trifle less reassuring:

"Murderer's disguise resists hot water. Pumice-stone being vigorously applied. Wilson's lamentations wringing stoniest hearts. Thrilling and sensational scene. No drama known to history approaching in fascination and horror to this extraordinary——"

The message ended abruptly here. Evidently the wireless word-painter was being supplied with fresh facts, and the crowd held its breath. When the facts appeared all present agreed that the Arabian Nights were somnolent and uneventful compared with this:

"Pumice-stone ineffective, but experts still confident of ultimate success. Are we down-hearted? No! Chemical reagents being prepared. Can a whisker resist the combined forces of science and American enterprise? Never! Molyneux shall not continue to resemble elderly clergyman much longer. Not if we know it! Pathos of Wilson's cries heartrending."

At last, late at night, came the final bulletin. It struck a chill into many a patriotic heart, and was followed next morning by several hundred scathing articles on America's degeneracy:

"Murderer foils us. Powers of science defied by whiskers."

PART V.

THE ATTIC

I

In no household in England was the voyage of the *Roumelia* followed with more earnest attention than in No. 47 Hyacinth Road. The essayist bought each edition as it came out, and devoured with the profoundest satisfaction the thrilling tale of the shadowing of Septimus Soper.

The prisoner in the attic, to whom each paper in turn was passed up, felt equally, and even more openly, delighted. The convenient situation of the cistern had enabled her to bathe her ankle frequently, and her revived spirits so accelerated the cure that she confidently counted on making her escape before a closer examination of Mr. Soper should perhaps again direct attention to No. 47.

As it was, the house in Hyacinth Road enjoyed comparative repose. Instead of the crowds who used to throng the quiet road, the recluse, when he glanced out of the windows, would only notice an occasional sightseer in the whole course of the day.

As for Buffington, he seemed to have vanished into space. They had not heard a word of him since he drove off to Euston. Save for an elderly

housekeeper, who always left at night, they enjoyed uninterrupted quiet. The recluse himself was surprised to find how many compensations there were for his otherwise ambiguous position. The house was so quiet and comfortable; his library window had been repaired; for an author pressingly busy upon a piece of literary work, the conditions were ideal. Besides, Felix Chapel was now rapidly losing all sense of his old identity, so that the odium attached to the name of Irwin Molyneux ceased to affect him as a personal affront; while the absence of the lady of the house seemed the most natural thing in the world when his daily task consisted in writing a picturesque narrative of her untimely end. Possibly also, the lady in the attic helped to assuage his impatience for her return, and even his anxiety concerning her fate.

But notoriety is an exacting mistress. As well might a divorced peeress expect to escape her claims as Irwin Molyneux! On the very day when Mr. Soper was being pumice-stoned, and every edition held a fresh sensation, Mr. Molyneux was startled by a loud knocking overhead. It was the means by which his fellow-recluse usually attracted his attention; except that infinite care was taken to make the signal as unobtrusive as possible. He ran out into the hall.

"Mr. Molyneux!" she cried through the trap-door.

He hurried upstairs.

"My dear Eva! Hush!" he expostulated.

"I can't!" she said. "It's too dreadful!"

He perceived that, like him, she held a newspaper.

"The dénouement has come on a trifle sooner than we expected," he replied, "but the situation is really so charming——"

"It's this advertisement I mean!" she interrupted. "Listen—'Latest Attraction—Molyneux and Wilson—Life-like Portrait Models!' We are being exhibited at Madame Tussaud's!"

"Tussand?" he gasped. "Among the waxworks!"

"In the Chamber of Horrors!"

He clutched the banisters.

"Us or the Sopers?"

"I don't know, but we must find out! Oh, please go and see! Please, Mr. Molyneux—at once!"

The retiring essayist seemed too overwhelmed to stir from the supporting banister.

"My God!" he murmured. "For all these years I have managed to keep out of *Who's Who*—and now I'm in the Chamber of Horrors!"

"Go quickly!" she pleaded.

"I shall!" he muttered. "I shall!"

He managed somehow to get downstairs, seized his felt hat, and rushed out of the house. He reached the green door, but before he could seize the handle it flew open.

"Hullo!" said James Buffington.

Mr. Molyneux made an heroic effort to seem calm.

"Hullo!" he replied. "You—er—back from Aberdeen?"

"I am," said Buffington briefly.

He was looking at Irwin so fixedly that a sensation of fresh discomfort troubled him. He endeavored to be absolutely natural.

"Aberdeen is termed the granite city, I believe," he observed. "I once met a man who was educated at the university there. Did you meet——? No, you would hardly meet him. He died some years ago."

He flattered himself that these remarks were well composed, and, except for a couple of gulps, which he trusted would pass unobserved, well delivered. Yet Buffington continued to look at him in the same uncomfortable fashion.

"I didn't go to Aberdeen to look for your defunct friends," he replied with what seemed a touch of asperity.

This time Mr. Molyneux felt sure his answer was couched in precisely the right vein.

"Ah, of course! You went to look for—what is his name?—Molyneux; yes, Molyneux. By the way, I see he has been arrested on the Atlantic."

"I do not believe Soper is Molyneux."

"Not believe——? Oh, my dear fellow!"

"No," said the expert, "I never did believe it. I believe that my first theory was right. I was a fool to have left this house. I have wasted all these precious days in that infernal town! Nothing but the whiskey would have——"

He broke off and his face became a mask once more.

"Are you coming back soon?" he asked.

"I? Oh, yes! In a little—a very short time."

"I'll see you then," said Buffington, moving towards the house.

Mr. Molyneux hesitated. Ought he to return? Oughtn't he? Which? What were the arguments? His head swam. The only thing he saw distinctly was a vision of himself modelled in wax and labelled —good Heavens, how was it labelled? He forgot James Buffington and his ominous manner. He forgot something else which he ought to have remembered, and hurried out through the gate.

II

BUFFINGTON entered the house. There he went straight into the library, opened the desk, and took out a packet of note-paper. Then from his pocket he drew the half sheet with that little note on it signed "Eva." He compared them with tense excitement.

"It *is* the same paper!" he exclaimed. "The very stuff I brought in when I came here! *This note was written after I arrived*—and good Heavens, it must have been written in this house!"

He looked at it again, closely and eagerly.

"It *is* her writing, I am certain!" he muttered, and sank into a chair in the profoundest thought.

It was the sudden inspiration that he knew the paper which had brought him headlong south again. And now his strange suspicion was actually confirmed.

"Confirmed!" he muttered. "There is no doubt about it!"

His thoughts turned to the drama on the Atlantic.

"I felt sure it wasn't the man! I felt it all along. The solution of the mystery lies hidden in this house! I said it at first! I stick to it now!"

He rose and paced the floor.

"But what *is* the solution?" he cried desperately. "What can it conceivably——"

He broke off and listened intently. Somebody was

tapping. He remembered the housekeeper in the basement and bent his head towards the floor. Tap, tap, tap! again. It clearly came from overhead. He quietly opened the door and stepped into the hall.

"Hullo!"

The word was almost whispered, but quite distinct. Such a sound in that house of mystery was enough to disturb the nerves even of a Buffington. For a moment they clouded his intellect. Instead of searching silently, he said:

"Who's that?"

Dead silence answered him, and then he heard another soft sound overhead. He looked up, and from his position at the foot of the stairs he could just catch a glimpse of the trapdoor in the ceiling of the floor above being cautiously closed.

Then in all its acuteness his intellect resumed its sway. As distinctly as though he still heard it, he recalled the sound of that voice.

"A woman!" he exclaimed, as he quietly ascended the stairs.

James Buffington paused beneath the trapdoor and reflected profoundly. He owed a duty to society, but he also owed one to himself. Ought he not to summon the police at once? What right had one man to risk his life (especially such a life as Buffington's) when by sending a constable in front of him, the worst that could happen would only be the promotion of another constable? Who would miss one bobby more or less? But one Buffington? There was only one Buffington!

When he started to come upstairs he had felt sure it was a woman. But supposing he had been mistaken? Could a woman possibly be lurking up there? Strangely enough, the actual truth was so improbable that it had not yet occurred to him; perhaps because, like many other great thinkers, he came to conclusions best when he was not asked to form them too suddenly. He decided to listen very carefully underneath every part of the attic.

He began by going into Felix Chapel's bedroom, and hardly had he entered when he started back with a stifled exclamation. A step-ladder was leaning against the wall, and suddenly there sprang into his memory a vision of Felix in his dressing-gown standing beneath the trapdoor at 3.30 in the morning talking to himself.

"To himself!" he smiled, and then he remembered the sound overhead that he had heard that night. Of course it was the trapdoor closing!

"Chapel keeping a girl in the attic!" he said to himself. "He's not as rum as I thought."

It was at that instant that James Buffington saw the path of duty clearly. He was surprised he had not seen it before. If any discovery were to be made in that house, even of a merely scandalous sort, James Buffington was the man to make it. He owed it both to himself and his editor. Calling in the police would have been fatal.

Without further hesitation this conscientious young man placed the steps out on the landing, climbed up, and pushed at the trapdoor. Some weight seemed

to be on it. He pushed harder. It gave a little, and then suddenly flew open, and at the same moment he heard a swish of skirts and footsteps flying away. Still further encouraged by the correctness of his reasoning, he poked his head through and looked round. The attic was very dark, but close beside the cistern he could just make out a crouching figure. He peered very, very carefully in all directions, till his eyes had grown a little accustomed to the gloom. By this time he felt certain there was no other figure lurking, and in this conclusion he was confirmed by the reflection that if there had been more than one person in the attic he could never have forced the door open.

He climbed through the trap and advanced upon the figure. Undoubtedly it was a girl.

In private life James Buffington was not without that element of gallantry which has marked the characters of most energetic and virile men. Nor was he lacking in sympathy for the pastimes and frailties of others. But at present James Buffington was on duty.

"What is this?" he said in a tone of stern surprise.

The girl answered nothing.

"Come here!" he commanded.

She did not move.

"If you do not come yourself I shall be under the unfortunate necessity of bringing you."

Still she neither spoke nor moved.

"Very well!"

He advanced a step further, took her by the arm, and led her towards the skylight. For an instant she resisted, and then with a shrug accompanied him, merely saying (in a voice which impressed him favorably):

"Don't pinch my arm, please!"

"Now," said he formidably, when he had got her to the light, "I shall have a look at you, young woman."

He looked, and his next words were spoken from several feet further away.

"Wilson!" he gasped.

His behavior seemed to impress her, even to the extent of affecting her own. The moment before she appeared to have been afraid of him; now, all at once, she became confident and even menacing.

"Yes," she said, looking at him steadily.

"Where—where is Molyneux?"

"Do you want him to catch you here?" she asked.

"Catch *me?*" he replied, rather hurriedly. "Let me tell you, it is a question of my catching *him!*"

"Are you sure?"

He began to dislike the unpleasant way in which she kept looking at him.

"We shall very soon see!" he said, still rather breathlessly, moving towards the trapdoor as he spoke.

"Are you going to leave me here?" she asked.

"I shall—er—return soon enough!"

"I shouldn't go down yet," she recommended.

"Why not?"

"You may meet him."

He started back from the trap.

"Don't think I am afraid of meeting him!" he said, at the same time illustrating his confidence by staring all round the attic, evidently to make sure that if his prey should happen to appear, no way of escape should be open to it.

"Are you there?" said a guarded voice from the trapdoor.

III

In petrified silence Buffington beheld first the head and then the body of a man rise through the trap-door. The next moment he had recognized it.

"Chapel!" he cried, and unafraid though he must have been (since we have his own word for it) there was something that sounded like extreme relief in his voice.

At the first sound Felix started violently, and with that start the terrible truth burst upon James Buffington. A thousand incidents were recalled in that one instant of time; from the extreme discomfort which Chapel evinced on the night of their first meeting, down to the episodes of the blue dressing-gown and the step-ladder. He realized he was actually in the murderer's presence, cooped up with him and his accomplice in a dark remote attic furnished with a sinister cistern.

In the reeling brain of Irwin Molyneux only one course of action hazily presented itself. He had contrived to explain away things before; why not go on explaining?

"My dear—er—Buffington," he began in his most cultured manner, "you are no doubt surprised to find this—er—lady here?"

Buffington seemed to mumble acquiescence.

"Naturally, my dear fellow, naturally. Well—

er—of course the fact really is that she is—er—by the way, do you happen to recognize her?"

The question was asked apparently with so much genuine anxiety that Buffington was reminded of a hundred novels. Precisely such were the cat-like preliminaries of all the most terrible monsters of romance. His reply was hoarsely ambiguous.

"Oh, yes; he does," said the girl.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the outlaw, still evidently toying with his prey. "How unfortunate! I quite confess it makes it seem so awkward—so very—er—suspicious. The fact of course is—ha! ha! ha!" (here the essayist was inspired to laugh pleasantly, and Buffington's blood ran cold) "—that this lady is not *really* Miss Wilson; but merely—er—a cousin. That accounts for the resemblance."

He cast an appealing glance at his accomplice, but could not catch her eye. She had discovered the moral effect of keeping it steadily on Buffington.

"No doubt—no doubt," said James hurriedly.

"I sometimes call her 'Eva' but only humorously," added Mr. Molyneux. "We often—ha! ha! ha!—laugh together over the—er—murder and so on."

An unsteady backward movement on the part of the expert disconcerted Mr. Molyneux. He feared he must have expressed himself less felicitously than he intended.

"We laugh over the idea of the murder, I mean," he hastened to explain, "not over the real murder. Oh, no, no! Only the idea! ha! ha!"

This dreadful mirth (for nothing less like ordinary human laughter was probably ever heard) wrung a low cry from the hapless Buffington.

"Molyneux!"

It was Mr. Molyneux's turn to start.

"You—you know *me*, too?" he stammered, and his face underwent a change that reminded Buffington of the transition of Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde.

James had originally been well brought up. A lie was his father's abhorrence, and the sole of a carpet slipper his remedy. Even in this dreadful crisis the young man probably ought to have remembered those early lessons. But who that has not faced unarmed a murderer in an attic can cast a stone at him?

"N—no, no!" he cried. "I—I was only joking!"

It has been remarked before now that the female criminal is frequently more ruthless than the male. In Molyneux's bewildered countenance Buffington thought he detected a momentary gleam of pity, but there was none in Eva's steady gaze.

"He knows who we both are," she said, "so of course we can't let him go, can we?"

Mr. Molyneux also forgot his early upbringing. Possibly in this extremity he reverted temporarily to some earlier and more carnivorous type; perhaps to his grand-uncle Reginald who had held a commission in the yeomanry.

"Good Heavens, no!" he exclaimed desperately. "Certainly he mustn't—certainly not! One on his bread-basket—that's the thing for him!"

Where he had picked up this formidable phrase he would probably have found it difficult to tell, but no words could have been more happily chosen.

"Mercy!" cried the unfortunate journalist, falling upon his knees. "I—I am an only son!"

"I can hardly think your parents will miss you very much," said Eva, with unconcealed contempt, "but perhaps for their sake we *may* let you live a little longer. Only you must *swear* not to move from this spot or make a single sound for the next twelve hours!"

"I swear! I swear!"

"We shall bolt the trapdoor," she continued, "so you can't get out; but——" her voice grew menacing, "if we find you trying to, we shall shoot a gun straight up at you! One of us will always be standing just below."

The guilty couple moved away.

"I feel very tempted to put him in the cistern!" she whispered. "He deserves it for being such a miserable little wretch!"

Mr. Molyneux started.

"I should quite like to get rid of him," he admitted, "but people catch such dreadful colds in wet clothes."

"Very well," she said with a sigh.

The trapdoor closed upon him, and James Buffington was left alone in the attic. His subsequent meditations were more serious than those commonly indulged in by young men in the prime of life. It was in that dark hour that he took the resolution of ex-

changing from the criminal to the athletic side of journalism. As he was prudent enough to follow Eva's injunctions to the letter, he has since lived to become one of the highest authorities on the noble science of pugilism.

IV

Irwin Molyneux never paused even when they reached the hall. As if he would continue his descent, he rushed towards the basement stairs. Eva seized his arm.

"Where are you going?"

"To settle with my housekeeper!" he cried. "She must be kept quiet too—if she blabs we are lost!"

His choice of language not less than his manner showed how desperately in earnest a man of letters can be when roused. She clung to him tightly.

"Stop!" she said urgently. "Mr. Molyneux—listen to me! I insist! You mustn't do anything so foolish! Come into the library!"

She led him in and closed the door.

"But why?" he protested. "Why shouldn't we settle her too? If she peaches we shall be hanged!"

"She has nothing to peach about!" she replied. "You will simply waste precious time. Get on your hat and coat and go away at once!"

"Perhaps—yes, conceivably that would be wisest. But you are coming too?"

"Not with you. We mustn't go *together*. You go first and I'll follow in a few minutes."

"But your ankle?"

"It is practically all right again. Please go at once!"

He took her hand, and bending on her a look of the most touching confidence, said earnestly:

"My dear girl, if you advise it I shall obey. For many years I have been accustomed in all the contingencies of practical affairs to rely upon the judgment of my poor wife. Were she here at this moment I should do implicitly whatever she recommended. I have never been precisely what you would call a resourceful man, and Harriet's aptitude for management has, I am afraid, led me to neglect my opportunities of improving myself. This wretched adventure has shown me that I am little better than a child. When I leave this house and reach the end of Hyacinth Road I literally shall not know which way to turn!"

"O dear!" cried Eva. "I wish I were more capable of advising you! The only thing I can think of is getting as far away from this house as we can,—and not being seen together!"

"But tell me where to go to? Mention any place you like; I really don't care where you suggest! If you would simply say 'keep on turning to the right,' it would be better than nothing."

"Go to Hammersmith and look for Mrs. Molyneux," she suggested.

"Thank you!" he said gratefully. "That is an excellent idea. My dear Eva—or perhaps I should say, my dear Miss Wilson——"

"Say neither. Marie Woolcombe is my real

name. Yes," she added, seeing his look of extreme surprise, "I was foolish enough to be ashamed of going into service for fear people should find out, so I took another name."

"Woolcombe?" he repeated. "I remember when I was at Oxford reading a small book of verse written by a person of the name of Woolcombe—or was it Ellicombe?" He turned to the bookcase. "I wonder whether I haven't still got that book somewhere."

"Mr. Molyneux!" she cried. "Don't trouble about it now! It is time you were away—high time!"

His face fell.

"Good Heavens!" he murmured. "So it is—so it is—high time!"

He moved towards the door, and then stopped.

"My dear Miss Ellicombe," he said, "or is it Woolcombe?"

"Woolcombe—but it doesn't matter!"

"I prefer to be accurate whenever possible. My dear Miss Elli——"

He broke off and sank into a chair, his face in his hands.

"In what condition am I to face the world!" he cried. "My head whirls—I cannot even say what I mean—I need my wife, Eva—I need my wife! Without her I am a mere——"

The door opened and he broke off with a nervous start.

"Lord Francis Phillimore!" announced the housekeeper.

V

THE tall and remarkably handsome young man who entered the library seemed to Mr. Molyneux vaguely familiar, though as the shock occasioned by his arrival had dislodged the essayist's glasses from his nose, he could not feel certain. On the other hand, his name was altogether strange.

"Mr. Chapel," said his visitor.

"I—yes, I believe so," replied Mr. Molyneux, with a hurried glance over his shoulder to seek his counsellor's support.

She had utterly vanished!

"Good Heavens!" he muttered, this fresh shock almost completely unmanning him.

His visitor seemed a little surprised by his manner, but continued suavely:

"You don't remember me?"

Mr. Molyneux was conscious of his first piece of good fortune that day—his wandering hand stumbled upon his glasses. They touched his nose, and dropped again suddenly. He had recognized his visitor.

"I trust," said Lord Francis, a little anxiously, "that you will pardon me for my deception the last time I called here. I must explain that I then passed under the name of Mr. Francis solely at the desire of my uncle, Lord Carraway."

The eyes of Mr. Molyneux instinctively turned to his lordship's hip pocket; the mind of Mr. Molyneux thereupon made a wild dash past his formidable visitor and tore headlong for the most distant village in Peru; but the body of Mr. Molyneux stood still hesitating upon the library floor.

"Qu—quite so," he murmured.

"Since the arrest of Molyneux on the *Roumelia*," continued Lord Francis, "I have had of course to give up my hopes of collaring the scoundrel myself. I am going abroad to-morrow, but before I went I felt I had to come and visit this house once more!"

With a sigh of heart-felt relief Mr. Molyneux sank into a chair.

"Saved!" he said to himself. "Saved!"

He was aroused from these happy meditations by a singular question.

"You know this house very well, Mr. Chapel," said his visitor suddenly, "perhaps you can tell me whether this was *her* room?"

"Hers?" said Mr. Molyneux. "Whose?"

"Mrs.—Mrs. Molyneux's."

The break in Lord Francis's voice at the mere mention of her name surprised his host considerably.

"You didn't by any chance know her?" he exclaimed.

Lord Francis fastened his eyes sadly upon him.

"I have already given you my confidence, Mr. Chapel," he said, "because I felt you would not abuse it, and I think I owe you some further explanation. I loved Mrs. Molyneux."

"You *what?*"

"And she loved me!"

In that shocking moment, the appearance of his effigy in the Chamber of Horrors, the bodily disappearance of Marie Woolcombe, even the prospect of a felon's cell seemed to Mr. Molyneux but trivial details.

"Explain yourself," he managed to articulate.

"Mrs. Molyneux and I loved one another," repeated the young man, sadly but firmly.

"My—I mean Mr. Molyneux's wife?"

"At the time I didn't know who she was. She kept that part of her life hidden from me. I knew there was a mystery, but I only guessed what it was on the very last evening of her life! Ah, if she had but trusted me! It would have made no difference to my love, and I might have saved her from that murderous brute!"

"Confound your——!" began Irwin, and then pulled himself up abruptly. He realized more acutely than ever the peculiar delicacy of his position. "I mean," he went on, "that I really should like to know a little more about this—er—this intrigue of yours. You actually say *she* loved *you?*"

A note of hostility in his manner had not escaped Lord Francis. He drew himself up, and replied with proud defiance:

"Yes, Mr. Chapel, she did. She loved me as only the greatest hearted women can love!"

"And she never told you she was married?"

"She told me nothing about herself—not even

where she lived. I only discovered that by following her home one night. And then—I read of her death!"

"Are you sure you are referring to *this* Mrs. Molyneux?"

"Perfectly. I made certain there was no other lady living in the house, and besides, she vanished at that very moment from my life. She never met me—never spoke to me—never kissed me again!"

It was Lord Francis's turn to have a train of painful thoughts summarily interrupted.

"Damnation!" shouted Irwin. (It was the first time he had ever used quite so strong an expression.) "You—you—you are a dissipated, wicked, treacherous, infamous—er—person! My Harriet! My Harriet!"

With these words the unhappy essayist rushed out of the room, and Francis could hear him banging in turn first the front door and then the green gate in the lane.

VI

"WHAT an extraordinary outburst!" said Francis to himself.

He had been far too bewildered to think of following the flying Chapel; nor did subsequent reflection serve to make his late host's conduct more explicable. Could this romantic looking journalist have been expressing moral horror? It seemed improbable. The violence of his language was so inconsistent with the usual behavior of the puritan party, so far as Francis was acquainted with it. Then for a moment he seemed to see a gleam of light when he recalled that extraordinary expletive, "My Harriet!" It sounded so like a humorous variant of "my hat!" that he began to accuse Mr. Chapel of an ill-timed attempt to be funny. Yet again, on further reflection, Mr. Chapel's conduct did not appear to be that of a wag.

"I can't understand it at all!" he said to himself, pacing the floor as he wrestled with the conundrum. "What could he——"

Both meditation and walk stopped abruptly. Scarcely moving a muscle and breathing very gently, he stood for quite a minute gazing at the window curtain. Beneath it, unmistakable and distinct, he saw the patent leather toe of a lady's shoe.

It was a delicate situation, but Lord Francis rose

to the occasion. Pulling himself together, he said in the most considerate manner:

"Madam, I don't know whether you are aware that one foot is visible."

The foot vanished and he heard a gasp. Then suddenly the lady stepped from behind the curtain.

"Lord Francis," she said, in a voice which she just managed to control, "I must explain——"

"Marie!" he cried.

She was silent, and her eyes fell.

"But what—aren't you—are you really alive?" he stammered.

"I am sorry, but I am," she murmured.

He sprang forward, and then stopped short.

"Mrs. Molyneux——" he began.

She interrupted him quickly.

"No, no," she said. "I'm not! You made a mistake. It was quite natural—she *was* the only lady in the house—I was her servant."

"Her servant—you!"

"Yes. That was why I never told you anything about myself till I had found some work you wouldn't feel ashamed of. Everything I *did* tell you was true! But I knew that if you learned the work I had been forced to accept—well, of course you see——"

He interrupted her with a lover's vehemence.

"I see I have got you again—and that's the only thing I want to see! Marie, you're alive—that's all I care about!"

VII

Down Hyacinth Road tore a distraught and breathless figure. Irwin Molyneux had not run fifty yards since he had left school, and despite the violence of his emotions he became aware of a stitch in his side by the time he had passed the first lamp-post; when he passed the second, his run had become a lurching canter; when he ran into a lady near the third, he staggered back against the wall and was just able to pant:

"I—beg—your pardon, Madam!"

The lady gave a little cry.

"Irwin!" she exclaimed. "Good gracious, I didn't recognize you! Where on earth are you going?"

He gazed at her with wide open eyes. It was his faithless wife.

"Harriet!" he gasped. "I—I know all!"

"All what?" she demanded.

"Lord Francis has confessed!"

"Do you mean to say he has come *here?*" she exclaimed.

"He has—he is in my house now—the home whose sanctity he has violated!"

"My dear Irwin," she said, kindly but sensibly, "you are surely unwell. What on earth do you mean?"

"Harriet, tell me the truth!" he implored her.

"About what?"

"Lord Francis and you!"

"But I thought he had told you."

"I want the *whole* truth!"

"It is perfectly simple," she said, "the exasperating young man has kept me locked up in a cottage near Maidenhead for the last ten days in order to extract a confession! At last when he heard of the arrest of the Sopers he came to the conclusion I *wasn't* Eva Wilson after all, and so he has let me go. That's all. What has he been telling you?"

In solemn accents, and with his eyes earnestly fixed upon her to detect the least symptom of a blush, he told her. To his surprise, instead of blushing, she first stared at him in extreme astonishment, and then burst into a cheerful laugh.

"Come!" she said, starting towards their violated home. "I think you will very soon see the explanation of this bad young man's story!"

"But, Harriet!" he besought her. "Tell me—I must have an answer! You have not deceived me?"

"At my age, is it likely?" she replied. "Please, Irwin, don't be absurd. And do take off that false moustache."

"Take it off? But I shall be recognized!"

"It is high time you were. You can easily finish the story of the crime out of your head. I don't know whether you're tired of being a murderer, but certainly I have been murdered quite long enough!"

"But what is the meaning of this extraordinary accusation?" he demanded once more.

She laughed again.

"Do you mean to say you can't see for yourself? My dear Irwin, I am afraid you would never make a great detective like Mr. Buffington. Of course it was Eva he knew."

"Eva!" he exclaimed.

"Obviously. And when he came in just now, you say she vanished. She didn't go out by the door?"

"Impossible, my love!"

"Then she hid behind the curtains, and by this time, of course, he must have found her. If we come into the house quietly I am perfectly certain we shall catch them embracing!"

They did.

The occasion was celebrated by a very pleasant little luncheon at No. 47. All sense of gloom and mystery seemed to have disappeared, and in none of them was the happy change more evident than in Marie, alias Eva. A smile lit her eyes continually, and though at first she persisted in expressing qualms about the propriety of an ex-house-parlormaid marrying so conspicuous a member of the aristocracy, Lord Francis speedily set her mind at rest.

"It's the loftiest thing my family have done for years!" he declared. "All my brothers have married into the chorus, and both my aunts keep hat-shops. You will give us a leg-up, I assure you."

Mr. Molyneux was equally relieved. In the course of a brief conversation on the telephone, Madam Tussaud had met his distaste for immortality in the handsomest spirit. When he actually *did* commit a murder, his effigy was ready for him; and the matter was left at that.

In fact, the one little cloud was a disquieting report from New York that, in despair of proving by any other means the identity of Septimus Soper with Irwin Molyneux, a proposal was being seriously considered to lynch him. However, as Mrs. Molyneux remarked, "There are plenty of much more deserving men waiting to fill his shoes."

This reflection dissipated the last shadow from their happiness.

THE END

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